

FACTORS INFLUENCING ON DECISION MAKING SKILL OF EXECUTIVES OF GOVERNMENT SECTOR SERVICE ORGANIZATION IN JAFFNA DISTRICT

Rathiranee Yogendrarajah
Department of Financial Management,
Faculty of Management Studies & Commerce,
University of Jaffna,
Jaffna, Sri Lanka.
rathi.yogen@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The focus of the study is to find out the impact of the factors which influence the Decision Making Skill of executives of Government Organization in the Jaffna District. Decision-making is the process of selecting one course of action from several alternative actions. Critical managerial decision making is the key to superior performance at work. Decision Making Skill of the Managers might be affected by various factors. This study addresses the influencing factors that are related to decision making, and categorizes them under five captions: Personal factors, organizational factors, Social factors, Environmental factors and behavioural factors. The prime Objective of this study was to identify the decision making skill of the executives and what are the factors that influence on their decision making. The central research question here is “what are the factors influencing the decision making of the executives”. To answer this question the data were gathered from the executives from top, middle and lower level in 15 Government Service organizations out of 55 under the Provincial Council in Jaffna District. A total number of fifty(50) Decision Making Questionnaires (DMQ) were issued but thirty seven (37) responded. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) method of data analysis was used to find out the results and it was discovered that the environmental factors and organizational factors have more significant influence on decision making than the other factors that are personal, social and behavioural factors.

Key terms : Decision making skill, personal factors, cultural factors, environmental factors, behavioural factors, social factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is self-evident that better problem solving and decision making by managers can greatly improve an organization's profits and goals. A number of studies have shown that managers do not achieve much over 50% correct results in their decision making and problem solving (Norman Edmund, 2009). In recent years decision making is being pushed further and further down the ranks of employees. So, if our management leaders improve their decision making knowledge and skills, the benefit would be widespread. If the decision will be effective one has to refer to critical Data, past records and performance metrics and analysis before making decisions. This research will try to

assess the various factors which influence decision making at workplace. Just because one strategy works for a particular organization may not prove to be equally effective for other organizations.

When Executives make decisions, they do not always make clinical evaluations using rational methodology, but systematically depart from utility maximization. There is no universal agreement on what constitutes a good decision and no generally accepted approach to good decision-making, so it is difficult to suggest the appropriate managerial abilities. A manager who is highly successful in making decisions for one organization might be unsuccessful in another due to the factors influenced in the decision making. The various factors influence the decision making of Executives in the Organization in different situation.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Manager's main job is decision making and quite often they have to decide on what is to be done, who is to do it, when, where and so on and so forth. The point where, from the many alternatives available, the manager has to chose one and adopt the plan. In doing so he has to be rational. But what is rationality? Can one be really rational in business? Since one cannot make decisions affecting the past and decisions must operate in the uncertain future and to top it all, it is difficult to recognize all the alternatives that might be followed to achieve the objectives, it is seldom that the manager can be rational. All he must do is to choose the best solution by selecting the alternative that most effectively satisfies goal achievement. Here comes the concept of Limited or "Bounded" Rationality. What is meant by this is that with the available limited information, time and experience, the manager's rationality is limited or bounded no matter how earnestly he tires to be rational. A problem in management is defined as any unfavourable gap between an expected state of affairs and an actual state of affairs, which call for a solution. In many organizations the decision taken by the Executives fail to achieve the specific goals or solutions due to various reasons which is the influencing factors and many government organizations expect these problems frequently by interference of several factors. The problem of this study is to identify as the following research question. The central research question here is;

RQ: "what are the factors influencing the decision making skill of the executives".

3 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The prime objective of this study is to identify the factors which produce the strongest impact on decision making skill of the Executives.

The following objectives are also important to be achieved by this study:

- To what extent each of the factors affect the executives' decision making skills in the public organizations.
- To find out at which level (top, middle, lower) they perform and what factors influencing in each level.

- To identify whether the same factors are influencing in different situations in different organizations.

4 THEORETICAL CONCEPT

Mc Kinsey study tries to assess the various factors which influence decision making at work. Executives often end up referring to wrong sources, which lacks scientific rigor and credentials in its finding, for arriving critical decisions. Just because one strategy works for a particular organization may not prove to be equally effective for other enterprises. According to Kinsey the following are the factors influencing Managerial decision making

1. Preparation of Budget:- Decision-making involves budget allocation i.e., resource allocation to various aspect of decision. Budget may be allocated to various factors of production. (Environmental factor)
2. Future Development:- Strategic plans are usually expected to have a significance future prosperity of the organization. This is because there is a long-term commitment. In case of absence of long-term commitment the firm cannot achieve future development. (Organizational factor)
3. Orientation:- Strategic planning should keep in view of the competition existing in the market. Some times firms have to face non-price competition. (Social factor)
4. Factors of Environment:- Plans are always influenced by business environment always influencing factor for decision-making. There may external or internal that influence business. Buyers, Suppliers, government and competitors are likely to react in accordance with changes in environment. Thus business also should act in the same passion. (Environmental factor)
5. Risk:- Strategic plans mostly face the problem of risk. The plans should able to tackle the risk bearing capacity. Risk and uncertainty are two important aspects, which can not be expected by business man. (Personal factor)

The following are the various important decisions in different functional management.

1. Planning:- It is a stage of “Strategic Formulation”. Strategic formulation includes forecasting, formulating objectives, policies and goals.
2. Organizing:- It is strategy implementation process. It includes all those managerial activities that result in a structure of task, authority and responsibility relationship.
3. Directing:- It also comes under strategy implementation process. Directing involves efforts directed towards shaping human behavioral. It includes; leadership, communication, motivation, morale, organizational change etc.,

4. Staffing:- Recruitment is an important function of Staff. Man power is required to implement strategies.

5. Controlling:- It can be called as Strategy Evaluation. Controlling refer to all those activities directed towards assuring that actual results are consistent with planned targets.

There are several factors that influence decision making. These factors, including past experience (Juliussan, Karlsson, & Gärling, 2005), cognitive biases (Stanovich & West, 2008), age and individual differences (Bruin, Parker, & Fischhoff, 2007), belief in personal relevance (Acevedo, & Krueger, 2004), and an escalation of commitment, influence what choices people make. Understanding the factors that influence decision making process is important to understanding what decisions are made. That is, the factors that influence the process may impact the outcomes.

Heuristics serve as a framework in which satisfactory decisions are made quickly and with ease (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008). Many types of heuristics have been developed to explain the decision making process; essentially, individuals work to reduce the effort they need to expend in making decisions and heuristics offer individuals a general guide to follow, thereby reducing the effort they must disburse. Together, heuristics and factors influencing decision making are a significant aspect of critical thinking (West, Toplak, & Stanovich, 2008). There is some indication that this can be taught, which benefits those learning how to make appropriate and the best decisions in various situations (Nokes & Hacker, 2007).

People make decisions about many things. They make political decisions; personal decisions, including medical choices, romantic decisions, and career decisions; and financial decisions, which may also include some of the other kinds of decisions and judgments. Quite often, the decision making process is fairly specific to the decision being made. Some choices are simple and seem straight forward, while others are complex and require a multi-step approach to making the decisions.

There are several important factors that influence decision making. Significant factors include past experiences, a variety of cognitive biases, an escalation of commitment and sunk outcomes, individual differences, including age and socioeconomic status, and a belief in personal relevance. These things all impact the decision making process and the decisions made.

Past experiences can impact future decision making. Juliussan, Karlsson, and Garling (2005) indicated past decisions influence the decisions people make in the future. It stands to reason that when something positive results from a decision, people are more likely to decide in a similar way, given a similar situation. On the other hand, people tend to avoid repeating past mistakes (Sagi, & Friedland, 2007). This is significant to the extent that future decisions made based on past experiences are not necessarily the best decisions. In financial decision making, highly successful people do not make investment decisions based on past sunk outcomes, rather by examining choices with no regard for past experiences; this approach conflicts with what one may expect (Juliussan et al., 2005).

In addition to past experiences, there are several cognitive biases that influence decision making. Cognitive biases are thinking patterns based on observations and generalizations that may lead to memory errors, inaccurate judgments, and faulty logic (Evans, Barston, & Pollard, 1983; West, Toplak, & Stanovich, 2008). Cognitive biases include, but are not limited to: belief bias, the over dependence on prior knowledge in arriving at decisions; hindsight bias, people tend to readily explain an event as inevitable, once it has happened; omission bias, generally, people have a propensity to omit information perceived as risky; and confirmation bias, in which people observe what they expect in observations (Marsh, & Hanlon, 2007; Nestler. & von Collani, 2008; Stanovich & West, 2008; see also West et al., 2008).

In decision making, cognitive biases influence people by causing them to over rely or lend more credence to expected observations and previous knowledge, while dismissing information or observations that are perceived as uncertain, without looking at the bigger picture. While this influence may lead to poor decisions sometimes, the cognitive biases enable individuals to make efficient decisions with assistance of heuristics (Shah & Oppenheimer, 2008).

In addition to past experiences and cognitive biases, decision making may be influenced by an escalation of commitment and sunk outcomes, which are unrecoverable costs. Juliusson, Karlsson, and Garling (2005) concluded people make decisions based on an irrational escalation of commitment, that is, individuals invest larger amounts of time, money, and effort into a decision to which they feel committed; further, people will tend to continue to make risky decisions when they feel responsible for the sunk costs, time, money, and effort spent on a project. As a result, decision making may at times be influenced by ‘how far in the hole’ the individual feels he or she is (Juliusson et al., 2005).

Aristotle’s Ideas About Practical Knowledge: In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes a distinction on two kinds of knowledge that is of the greatest relevance to the practical decision consultant and the decision maker. By theoretical knowledge he means knowledge of things that do not change, which in ethics means the general, universal things we can say about what is really right and wrong, and what is living well and living badly. For Aristotle, the moral virtue is a state of character in which we are disposed to feel things in accordance with the means, that is, to feel them in the right way, to the right person, at the right time, for the right reason. However, theoretical knowledge on its own is not enough to lead a flourishing human life. We also need practical knowledge, which for Aristotle means knowing the right thing to do in a particular circumstance through understanding the circumstance rightly, knowing what matters, and effective means-end reasoning to bring about what matters. One can know the right thing to do in general, and what is required, as theoretical knowledge, but this is of little use if one fails to apply this knowledge to this situation.

Spinoza on the Emotions: Unpacking the emotional core of a decision is, we believe, and will illustrate below, vital. There are various philosophers we have found to be of most use in helping dealing us towards wise decision-making.

Spinoza's idea that the emotions contain their own logic; and their own reason by arguing that emotions are very much like a sense which helps us to detect value. Emotions, although they have their own logic, are not necessarily reliable. Indeed, not only are they often motivated by our needs, but they also distort our picture of the world. Given the cognitive content of the emotion we can see that emotional knowledge lies in making sound judgments about the significance of an event, and an appropriate reaction to it. As For decision-making we must not ignore the emotions – else we risk both missing out their informational value and allowing them to distort our view of the situation, the problem, what matters, our options and our ability to implement the decision. The decision-making consultant can help in a number of ways, both in dealing with the particular decision being faced by asking the decision-makers about their emotions. What do they feel – is it anger, anxiety, excitement, or being overwhelmed? Next, we need to question them what this emotion is about. If they are angry what is this anger directed towards, if they are feeling overwhelmed what about the problem seems overwhelming to them, if they are excited what about the decision excites them. Thirdly, we need to ask – and here the greatest skill and tack is required - whether, on reflection, this emotion is appropriate. (Behavioural factor)

Nietzsche's Critical and Creative Thinking: Creative thinking is the generation of thoughts, ideas, decisions and actions, often by novel and unexpected means. Such thinking is useful at different stages in the process of decision-making.

Knowledge and Information Are Different: Thinking of them as similar or synonymous distorts the entire concept of managing intangible assets. When we speak or write, we use language to articulate some of our tacit knowledge in an attempt to pass it on to others, it is called information. Knowledge and information are often confused with each other. In the information technology industry, they are used as synonyms. Thus, the word information is usually associated with both facts and the communication of facts. Information is in many ways ideal for communicating explicit knowledge. It is fast, independent of the originator, and secure. All three of these features are of vital importance in the information technology era because the computer is designed to handle information. So it is tempting and seems commonsensical for the sender or speaker to attribute information with some sort of meaning. The trouble is people know more than they are conscious of or can put into words. For example, try to explain in words how to drive a golf ball or serve a tennis ball. These concepts are too complex to express fully in words. Attempts to do so are often ridiculous and almost always incomprehensible. The receiver of information – not the sender – gives it meaning. Information, as such, is meaningless. Information is perfect for broadcasting articulated knowledge but is unreliable and inefficient for transferring knowledge from person to person. It is best not to write but to talk when we wish to transfer knowledge.

Concept of Ethics and Morality: What is this concept we are trying to understand? "Morality is a system of rules that modifies our behavior in social situations. It's about the doing of good instead of harm, and it sets some standard of virtuous conduct." Evaluating the difference of doing well versus harm and to what extent is subjective but this does not preclude us from attempting to find common ground. Please note that for the purposes of this paper I will use the terms ethics and morality interchangeably from this point forward. Often one identifies five principles in common morality.

5 METHOD

5.1 SAMPLE:

The sample consisted of 37 respondents working in the Government Organizations however the questionnaires were issued for fifty (50) respondents. This study was thus based on the sample of the Executives (Top level, Middle level and lower level) from Government Sector Service Organizations in Jaffna District. In Jaffna there are more than 55 Government Service Organizations of which 15 organizations have been selected 7 from piradesa saba, 2 from education office, 1 from Jaffna Kachcheri, 5 from Divisional secretariat office, and information collected from 37 respondents who were Top, Middle and Lower level executives. Primary and Secondary data were used and the information was gathered by using Decision Making Questionnaire (DMQ) which carried out structured, semi-structured and open-ended questions. The sample size consisted of executives in various positions who were Divisional secretariat, Chief Executives, Accountants and Administrative officers. The data were collected personally by the researcher and also by using direct interviews with respondents. The sample size was obtained on all management levels, but most respondents were from the Top and Middle level management, with an assumption that they would possess accurate Decision making skills. Decision making skill of the Executives that have been measured by using questionnaire has indicated whether or not they adopt the steps in the decision making process as follows:

- Step 1 : Recognized the problem or opportunity
- Step 2 : Analyze the situation
- Step 3 : Consider the goals
- Step 4 : Look for alternatives
- Step 5 : Consider the consequences
- Step 6 : Select the best alternatives
- Step 7 : Act upon the decision
- Step 8 : Accept the responsibility
- Step 9 : Evaluate the results.

5.2 TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire consists of 43 items, which regarded: (1) Personal factors consist of 9 items, (2) Organizational factors consist of 5 items, (3) Social factors consist of 3 items, (4) Environmental factors consist of 5 items, (5) Behavioural factors consist of 7 items, and (6) Decision making skill consists of 14 items.

5.3 MEASURE OF DECISION MAKING SKILL:

For the purpose of measuring the Decision Making Skill, the questionnaire developed as 5 Point Likert type Scale. The items were scored on 5-point scale with the response categories being:

- 1 - Strongly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Undecided
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly agree

The decision making skill was measured based on the steps involved in the decision making process which is being adopted when the executives take decision.

From the above 28 persons out of 37 are identified that they possess effective Decision Making skill by measuring ≥ 4 . The Average of ≥ 4 of total score was used to find out the Decision Making skill. Then the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) has been used to find out the relationship between the Decision making skill and the influencing factors.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigated that the factors which influence on Decision Making of the Executives in the Government Sector Service Organizations by the use of correlation and regression analysis. In the largely theoretical literature and conventional wisdom among executives, there is a drawback in the decision making skill by influencing factors affecting decision making skill. This study provides broad evidence in support of these assertions: From the data collected and analyzed with the help of SPSS that it focused the relationship between the Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors and Decision Making Skill are as follows:

Table 6.1: Level of Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors and Decision Making Skill

Variables	Personal Factor	Organizational Factor	Social Factor	Environmental Factor	Behavioural Factor	Decision Making Skill
Personal Factor	1	.566(**)	.601(**)	.533(**)	.284	.372(*)
Organizational Factor		1	.338(*)	.382(*)	.324	.656(**)
Social Factor			1	.494(**)	-.138	.140
Environmental Factor				1	.067	.629(**)
Behavioural Factor					1	.320
Decision Making Skill	.372(*)	.656(**)	.140	.629(**)	.320	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation test was made to examine the relationship between variables and results are tabulated. The Organizational, Social and Environmental factors have more influence on decision making skill than other factors which the Personal and the behavioural factors. Table 6.1 shows that there is a positive relationship between all factors and Decision making skill. There is a positive relationship between Organizational, Social and Environmental factors and decision making skill at 0.01 significant level and Personal factor and Decision making skill at 0.05 significant level. From these results what is revealed all the factors having influence on the decision making skill and organizational factors and Environmental factors have more influence.

Table 6.2: Regression analysis for influencing factors and decision making skill
Dependant variable: Decision Making Skill

a Predictors: (Constant)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Personal Factor	.372(a)	.138	.114	.53244
Organizational Factor	.656(a)	.430	.414	.43313
Social Factor	.140(a)	.020	-.008	.56794
Environmental Factor	.629(a)	.396	.378	.44596
Behavioural Factor	.320(a)	.103	.077	.54339

Regression analysis was carried out to test the impact of Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors on Decision Making Skill. In this study Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors are the independent variable and Decision Making Skill is the dependant variable. From these independent and dependent variables, the following relationship is formulated.

Decision Making Skill (D) is dependent upon the Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors (P+O+S+E+B). It is represented as follows:

$$D = f(P+O+S+E+B) + e$$

To test the impact of personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors on Decision Making Skill, the following equation can be formulated.

$$D = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (P) + \beta_2 (O) + \beta_3 (S) + \beta_4 (E) + \beta_5 (B) + e$$

Where $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ and β_5 are the regression coefficient

- D = Decision Making Skill
- P = Personal Factors
- O = Organizational Factors
- S = Social Factors
- E = Environmental Factors
- B = Behavioural Factors

e = error term

From the Table 6.2, we can observe that the Decision Making skill is influenced by Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors by 13%, 43%, 02%, 40% and 10% respectively. Further, the table illustrates the Decision Making Skill is mostly affected by Organizational and Environmental Factors other than Personal, Social and Behavioural factors.

Table 6.3: Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.832(a)	.692	.643	.33817

a Predictors: (Constant), Bf, Ef, Of, Sf, Pf

Table 6.3 shows the Multi Regression Analysis for all factors which produces a strong impact on Decision making skill of the Executives. From this table we can observe that the Decision Making Skill is influenced by Personal, Organizational, Social, Environmental and Behavioural factors by 70% and 30% is affected by other factors such as Financial, Ethics and safety etc.,.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study the conclusion drawn is that when the Executives take decisions in the government Organizations, the decisions are mostly affected by organizational and environmental factors. The Organizational strengths and weaknesses are the importantly influencing factors. The external and internal environmental factors such as the risk and uncertainty of the environment affect the decisions taken by the Executives. The political interference is the influencing factor in the Government Organizations. The decisions are taken by the Executives with the political opinion other than public benefits.

As the environment in which we make decisions becomes more complex both the opportunity and the corresponding responsibility of making decisions increase. The key factor in “making things happen” instead of just “letting things happen” is skillful decision making. One of the vital characteristics of a good manager is the ability to make decisions that direct and guide actions and resources in a planned direction. Individuals, families and other groups can choose their own futures by making sound decisions and putting them into action.

The influencing factors could be affected favourably or unfavourably on decision making of the Executives in different situations and the favourable conditions could be considered and unfavourable factors should be ignored to lead better decisions.

Managers must be effective decision makers and problem solvers, because, the decision making and problem solving process is an important part of the manager's job. Its ultimate objective is to solve specific problems identified.

Finally, It would be suggested some characteristics of "Good" decision makers:

- Having a high tolerance for ambiguity.
- Having a well-ordered sense of priorities.
- Being a good listener.
- Always building the consensus around a decision.
- Avoiding stereotypes.
- Remaining resilient with feedbacks.
- Being comfortable with both soft and hard input.
- Being realistic about cost and difficulty.
- Avoiding a decision minefield.

One must explore the skills and knowledge necessary to facilitate a decision making process. Therefore, developing Aristotle's insights, the decision consultant and the decision maker need both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. These conditions can be understood as a series of stages in decision-making:

- **Understanding the situation and decision:** The decision-maker needs to understand the decision being faced, and the situation it is located in, as accurately, open-mindedly and fully as is reasonable.
- **Understanding what matters:** the decision-maker needs to understand what really his/her ultimate objective is. What values are at stake?
- **Searching for options:** Even if the decision-maker understands the situation and appreciate what matters, they still need to be aware of the possible options.
- **Choosing the best option:** Each option needs to be assessed in a logical manner, choosing that option which, given a sound understanding of the situation, satisfies as much as possible of what matters. If we lack the critical powers to assess these options, then we will still fail to make wise decisions.
- **Implementing the decision:** Finally, the decision-maker prepares for implementing the decision, armed with a fallback plan and follow-up activities to check on the implementation. Once the decision-maker has made a selection of the best option, they need to make a final check on it, and work out how to implement and monitor it.
- **Getting Feedback.** Monitoring the implementation of the activities.

9 LIMITATIONS

For practical implementation purpose only Jaffna District has been selected to gather information. The data have been collected from Government Sector Service Organizations under the Provincial Council without attaching a significant consideration to other organizations. The information was

gathered only from Executives and not from the employees in the organizations. All factors which influence the decision making are commonly considered and no models are considered separately.

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