Traditional Organization Meeting Style Is Not Conducive to Group Decision-Making

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Abstract

Traditional group meeting style in an organizational setting is a common platform for collaborative decision-making. This setting can be disruptive and fraught with bias, resulting in unhealthy conflict and failure to accomplish the goals of the meeting. The outcome of said meetings can offer false representation of support for a given decision. The author sought out to devise a new decision-making model that will attempt to remove unwanted bias from the decision-making process. Common attributes that result in bias include the lack of information and under time constraints, decisions made without enough background information and in a perceived limited time frame. The makeup of the organization meetings with supervisors, subordinates, mentors can create bias when votes are verbal, not anonymous. This paper explores problems with group decision-making and why the current method provides a false representation of support. Current methods for group decision making are defined and include the Naturalistic Decision-Making model, Multi-Attribute Utility Analysis, and Decision Analysis. The Nominal Group and Delphi techniques are explored as options available, but not successful in this situation. Based on the current models, techniques, and the needs of the organization meetings, a successful alternative to decision-making in a group environment is characterized and explained.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify the need for and to introduce a new decision-making model that works within the confines of an organization's meeting

environment. Current decision-making models, techniques, and methods will be introduced. The application of current models to organization meetings, and why these models are ineffective, and lastly the dissection of the models, taking from them the successful parts that combined give us this new decision-making model. An operational definition of decision can be described as an action, a commitment to act, a conclusion to what has been done, or quite simply a choice. Alternatives are then evaluated, and opinions are voiced by the meeting participants (Smith, 2003). The voting process can be done verbally, with a raised hand, or with paper and pen. The group is defined in this paper as a gathering of more than two individuals. Business meetings are typically comprised of people employed by the organization.

A traditional organization meeting has the attendees sitting around a table in a room typically in an unassigned seating arrangement. There may be some members at the meeting with assigned tasks such as a recorder, meeting chairperson or assigned facilitator. Another commonality among the organization meeting is the backgrounds of those present. To exacerbate the issue participants of the meeting may be at different promotional levels: managers, mentors, and low-level colleagues. The agenda or goal of the traditional organization meeting may include decision making, finding alternatives to current issues, discussing the merits of the outcomes, and ultimately choosing a non-biased workable solution (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002).

Participation in the organization meeting is imbalanced, and the status of members may determine which members dominate the conversations. Higher ranking members typically speak more than lower ranking ones and often males speak more than females (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992; Handley, 1994). All members should have the opportunity to provide input regarding a decision; however, unwanted conflict can arise when there is disagreement on the direction of a decision before a vote is made. The agenda or goal of the traditional organization meeting may include decision making, finding alternatives to current issues, discussing the merits of the outcomes, and ultimately choosing a non-biased workable solution (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002). In this paper, the author will discuss group decision models and how the model fits the need. This paper will introduce problems surrounding the process of collaborative decision-making and introduce a new model that will remove bias, allow for anonymity and distance voting, and present an accurate representation of the support by the members of a proposed decision.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are 3 currently used group decision-making methods (Figure 1), the Political Model (PM) (Pfeffer, 1981), the Rational Model (RM) (Simon, 1977; Turpin & Marais, 2006), and the Naturalistic Decision Making Model (NDM) (Klein & Klinger, 1991; Klein, 2008; Turpin & Marais, 2006) that are collectively used to make the current decision making model seen in some organization meetings
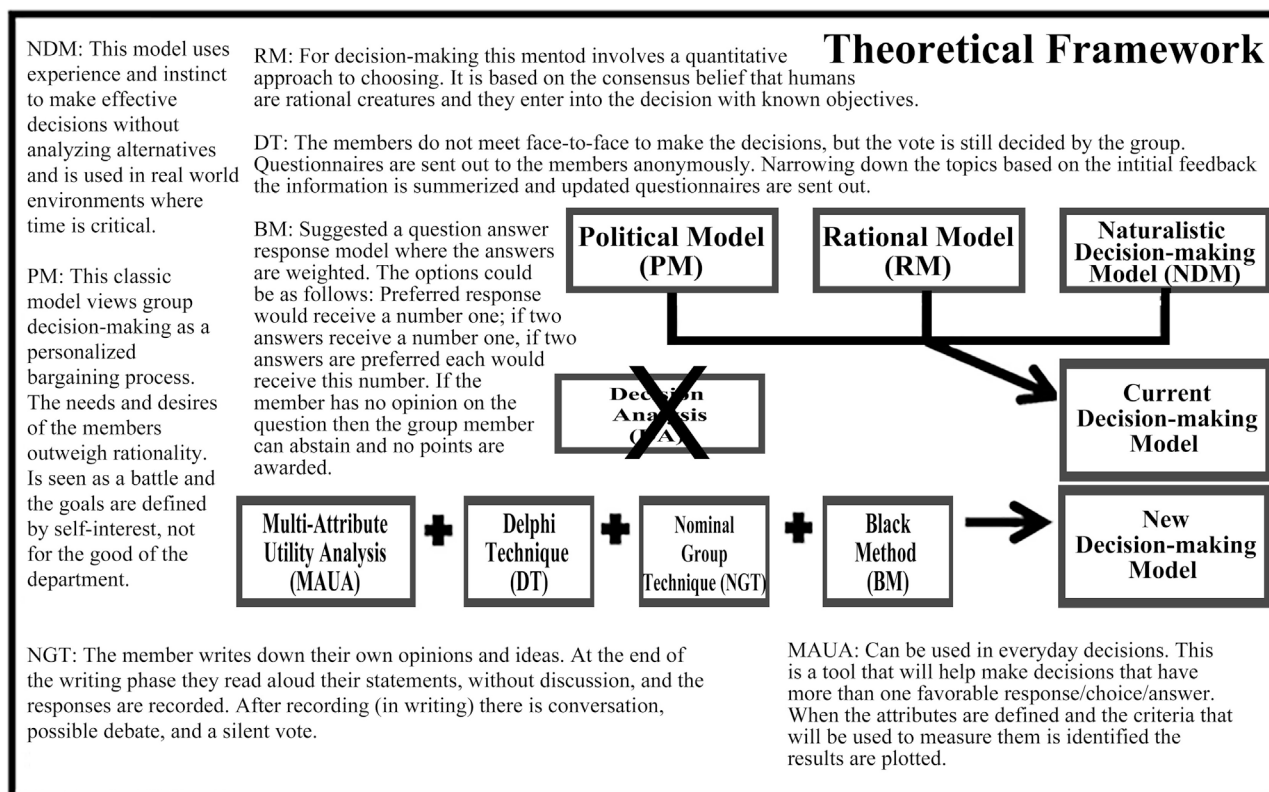
Figure 1. Theoretical framework of current models, methods, and techniques that make up the current organization decision making method and proposed new decision-making model.

(see table one for Framework chart). After a careful review of the literature a new decision-making model was derived from the Multi-Attribute Utility Analysis (MAUA) (Lin, Lee, Chang, & Ting, 2008), the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) (Ven & Delbecq, 1974; Delp, Thesen, Motiwalla, & Seshadri, 1977), the use of the Delphi Technique (DT) (Ven & Delbecq, 1974) and the Black Model (BM) (Black, 1948).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Complications of Group Decision Making

According to (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002) there are common behavioral issues when groups meet. Attendees tend to talk without waiting for an appropriate opening and raise their voice to speak above the one leading the meetings. Members are often so busy planning on what they wish to say next they do not listen to what is being expressed by others. Depending on people chairing the meeting, discussions may be disorganized, going off on tangents, with members spend more time expressing their professional qualities, and the original topic is often lost. During the meetings, some members disengage from the main conversation and start sid bar conversations with neighboring members (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002). Aggression is another common emotion expressed in meetings. Specific examples include when one or two

members dominate the time, agenda, and monopolize the meeting with their opinions (Oade, 2018). Passive aggression is also common and can be distracting as well as time consuming when participants resort to sarcasm and cutting humor (Wheatley & Crinean, 2004; Williams & Packer-Williams, 2019).

When group members are asked to vote on a matter, factors other than their opinion may influence their decision. They may fear angering members with greater influence or may seek approval from others at the table. The result is a vote that may not reflect the decisions the members would make if they were free to vote as choose. This leaves a potential for a decision in which the majority does not support. When the group is not committed to the choice they make they will be less enthused, have less buy-in, may purposefully sabotage the objectives, or simply lack initiative to move forward with the idea (Kotlyar, Karakowsky, & Ng, 2011). The science of rational behavior makes the assumption that people are self-interested in the sense they care only about their material payoff, not the organization. In their case they were describing a gamer, a video game player. They believed that a rational person by default had selfish needs (Kugler, Kausel, & Kocher, 2012; Djulbegovic, Elqayam, & Dale, 2018).

Another potential problem seen in the organization meeting group decision process is "Groupthink". "Groupthink" is when a unified group reaches a decision without considering alternatives. It happens when a close group makes a decision based on the goal of consensus rather than the problem or alternative solutions. This is seen time and again in organizations, politics, and government (Lunenburg, 2010; Henningsen, Henningsen, & Russell, 2017; Harel, Mossel, Strack, & Tamuz, 2017).

When a person has one or more qualities that make all other qualities less important it is called a halo effect. Sometimes the characteristics of the halo effect should not have as much weight, but do when hiring or decision making. An example would be hiring a person with a Ph.D. because they have the degree and disregard that they do not have the qualities that would make them successful at the position. The only way to prevent the halo effect is to try and define all the points necessary to make the optimal choice (Gibney & Shang, 2007).

3.2. Benefits of Group Decision Making

The collective experiences and knowledge of a group trumps an individual. Face-to-face organization meetings offer more interactivity than emails, phone, or other social media. Meetings held in the same room will give a better overall picture of what is being communicated when one can hear and see the verbal and nonverbal communication. This results in a faster response time and potentially fewer misunderstandings. Privacy and security of information in an academic setting is of utmost importance. This is easier to accomplish in a face-to-face environment. Group cohesion and department support can be enhanced when all are present (Mina, 2000). The benefits of face to face organization meetings are not in question; the meetings can offer brainstorming sessions,

information gathering, and sharing as well as soliciting aid from another organization on projects and teaching. Their usefulness as a tool for decision making is in question. Some amount of conflict can be positive and result in diverging ideas (Schulz-Hardt, Jochims, & Frey, 2002).

3.3. Decision-Making Methods

The model of group decision making that closely mimics an organization meeting is the Naturalistic Decision Making (NDM) model. This model uses experience and instinct to make effective decisions without analyzing alternatives and is used in real world environments where time is critical (Klein, 2008; Turpin & Marais, 2006). Research for the NDM model for decision making was done by observing decision makers such as fire-fighters, emergency room personnel, and urban fore-ground commanders, as they handle non-routine events (Klein & Klinger, 1991).

A recreation of the NDM features as seen in Klein and Klinger's (1991) paper, geared to an organization meeting to show a similarity between the NDM and an organization meeting. Like the NDM, when making a decision the organization members use experience and instinct to make decisions without analyzing alternatives and time is critical. The information composed of experience and instinct is often full of ambiguity or missing data. Decisions are made based on the little information given, and the members own personal experiences. Organization meetings are time sensitive, so decisions have to be made within a small window of time. Typical meetings are 60 - 120 minutes long. There are multiple members at the table with their goals. Outcomes of the decisions could influence promotions, increase teaching loads, mentoring or committee commitments.

Organization members are typically experienced in university issues and base their responses off of those proficiencies, or the benefit they derive from the solution (Klein & Klinger, 1991). It is not uncommon for the NDM model to be followed in such a way that voting is secondary to everyone having a voice and getting their personal goals and accomplishments acknowledged. When this happens, the actual voting does not. This is when the organization members leave the meeting feeling very little was accomplished. The NDM model may work to save lives in a real-world setting, but it has no place in the organization meeting room.

Pfeffer (1981) defines organizational politics as activities that acquire, develop and use power to obtain desired goals when there is uncertainty about choices/outcomes. With this in mind we are reminded of another popular theoretical framework, the Political Model. This classic model views group decision making as a personalized bargaining process. The needs and desires of the members outweigh rationality. This decision-making style is seen as a battle, and the goals are defined by self-interest, not for the good of the department or the organization as a whole. Many organizations pretend that power and influence should not or does not exist (Pfeffer, 1992). With this model, we could embrace the

power struggle. This would not lead to successful organization meetings.

The Rational Model for decision making involves a quantitative approach to the art of choosing. It is based on the consensus belief that humans are rational creatures, and they enter into the decision with known objectives and four defined steps: Intelligence, Design, Choice, and Review. During the choice step, all options, alternative responses, choices, provided are assigned a number based on value, the higher the number the move value it represents. There are known problems with the model, such as assumptions that are made, are all of the options clearly known, as well as the consequences of implementing each alternative (Simon, 1977; Turpin & Marais, 2006).

Multi-Attribute Utility Analysis (MAUA) can be used in everyday decisions. This is a tool that will help make decisions that have more than one favorable response/choice/answer. When the attributes are defined, and the criteria that will be used to measure them is identified the results are plotted (Lin, Lee, Chang, & Ting, 2008). If MAUA is applied to a common decision one would make in an organization meeting it could be something like the following, the addition of a class. This would warrant a consideration of the outcomes of a new class, such as increased revenue, time constraints and availability of the teaching organization. While doing so one may find that offering a class that meets less than one day a week for a longer time is better than three days a week for shorter class lengths. The point of this is to say there are several alternatives to consider. The idea behind MAUA is that all of the alternatives are plotted and the "best outcome" is the one that falls within the preferences of the group. Decision Analysis (DA) is another classical method of decision making that uses branches of responses and applies probability of each possible outcome (Klein & Klinger, 1991). MAUA and DA are often found to be cumbersome and time-consuming, and these formal models are replaced with the NDM model.

3.4. Alternative Decision-Making Models for the Traditional Meeting

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) is as follows: The member writes down their opinions and ideas. At the end of the writing phase, they read their statements aloud, without discussion, and the responses are recorded. After recording (in writing), there is a conversation, possible debate, and a silent vote (Ven & Delbecq, 1974; Delp, Thesen, Motiwalla, & Seshadri, 1977).

The Delphi Technique (DT) does not have the members sitting around a table as seen with the NGT or standard organization meeting. The members do not meet face-to-face to make the decisions, but the vote is still decided by the group. Questionnaires are sent out to the members anonymously. Narrowing down the topics based on the initial feedback, the information is summarized, and updated questionnaires are sent out once again, only to the members that responded to the first round. At the end of this second round the responses are summarized, reports are generated and sent out to the members that submitted

responses in this last round (Ven & Delbecq, 1974).

Black (1948) suggested a question answer response model where the answers are weighted. The options could be as follows: preferred response would receive a number one; if two answers are preferred each would receive this number. If the member has no opinion on the question, then the group member can abstain, and no points are awarded. In the end, the responses are recorded based on preference (Black, 1948).

3.5. Group Interaction and Behavior in Meetings

The group's interaction and behavior can enhance the knowledge and effectiveness of the group; however, it is also possible that the interactions and displayed behavior will have a detrimental effect on the group's performance and ability to complete a task (Hackman & Morris, 1974). Structured approaches to group decision making like the Nominal method and the Delphi technique limit group interactions (Burleson, Levine, & Samter, 1984). Cooke & Lafferty (1988) designed a 60-item self-scoring inventory to assess the interactions of group members. The tool measures three interactive styles, constructive, passive and aggressive interactions. Group output style and effectiveness were seen to have a link according to Cooke & Szumal (1994) with constructive behavior positively related to solution quality and acceptance, and passive behavior negatively linked. Aggressive behavior was not related to quality but was found to be negatively related to acceptance of the proposed decision. The problem with this method, as stated by the authors, was that the measures of group interaction style and acceptance were done from the same source and the same survey tool (Cooke & Szumal, 1994).

4. Research Questions

Research question: Is there a need for a new group decision-making model to be used in organization meetings?

Hypothesis: There is a need for a new group decision-making model in an academic setting.

Null hypothesis: There is no need for a new group decision-making model in an academic setting.

There is a need to improve a commonly seen organization meeting style concerning decision making. Decisions are often made by organization members without the prerequisite background information to make a decision. They may be biased in their decision due to lack of interest or fear of retribution, even the need for maintaining friendship can bias the decision-making process. We have set out to find out if the traditional organization meeting style conducive to group decision making. A new decision-making model is just one step in making the organization meeting a more productive event for all that attend. When combined with a strong facilitator, respectful and knowledgeable organization members, my new model can enhance policy making and voting in the academic

setting. Our hypothesis is that there is a need for a new decision-making model and that the one described in this paper meets that need.

5. Methodology

Participants and Sampling Descriptions

The techniques mentioned in this article contribute to the new model that we propose to replace the currently used methods. After a deep dive into the different decision making models it was determined which techniques could contribute to what would be a new, better decision-making model. What will work best for the organization meeting setting are the following: The Nominal Group technique of writing the responses down on paper, the Delphi technique using questionnaires style and including those not physically present, and the Duncan Black method of ranking preference combined make up the optimal decision making model for this setting. At the start of each meeting, the author puts forward an approved formatted document that is dispersed to each member present and emailed to those not present. Electronic communication methods allow all members to connect without concern for distance and time (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992); because this communication is done by email and the document does not require a verbal explanation to ensure all have a working background this method works for this model. This document includes the date and time of meeting and the author of the question/problem posed. The body of the document includes the question/problem and all possible outcomes. Below the question is a section dedicated to background information necessary to answer the question proposed. There is also a comments section and signature line.

The question will be answered using Black's method of ranking and preference. At the end of the meeting the forms are collected, the data tabulated, and the results are mailed to the members, those present at the meeting and those not present. If members are unsure on how to reply or have questions that are not clearly outlined in the background section they can choose to abstain. With this method a vote can be delivered via paper without the conflict, emotional outburst, steering of conversation and with some resemblance of knowledge, assuming they read the background and the form define that in a manner all understand.

6. Conclusion

Organization meetings based on the NDM, political or rational model using the interacting technique (Ven & Delbeqc, 1974) is not optimal for decision making. MAUA and DA are time-consuming and will require research and explanations that would need to be performed by the member proposing the problem or idea up for a vote (Lin et al., 2008). They may require additional reading and research by members of the organization meeting. It would be challenging to verify that all members have read, interpreted, and understood the material prior to the meeting. People maintain a small amount of relevant information and fail to no-

tice available information. They often lack important information to make a decision (Milkman, Chugh, & Bazerman, 2009).

One will find that unless the outcome will enhance the personal goals of the members this additional time requirement will not happen (Kugler et al., 2012). This is why the naturalistic decision-making model is most often seen in an organization meeting. The political model is also prevalent in an organization meeting sitting and creates biases. The pool of organization may be too small to effectively utilize the Delphi technique. With each generation of questionnaires, the sample size decreases. Unless the organization size is larger or responding to the questionnaires becomes mandatory, this would not be effective.

The nominal group technique, developed by Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson (1975), is a structured method used in groups to prioritize ideas for a specific question (Wortley, Tong, & Howard, 2016). It offers anonymity and public discussion, but it is the opinion of the author that Black's method of question layout as well as a formal written question(s) with background information, and the member's signature be part of the working formula for organization meeting group decision-making. If the document is sent prior to a meeting via electronic communication it is important to be aware that members may discuss, creating biases but as a method for dispersal email does well for anonymity (Baltes, Dickson, Sherman, Bauer, & LaGanke, 2002).

7. Potential Benefits

When a "raise hands for yes" vote is done the buy-in for the vote is unknown. The potential bias remains unidentified. This new model will make the decision-making process an anonymous, time-saving, and conflict-free method. Several votes can be accomplished in one meeting. Everyone voting will have the same background of information to ensure informed voting. The use of several alternatives allows the voter to choose an answer more specific to what they want and can answer yes to more than one choice. The final picture will give more than just a yes/no tally; it gives, at a glance, the big picture. The vote will recognize how many members chose the answer as their first choice, second choice, and so forth, as well as those that abstain, who do not support the decision (see Appendix for a sample of the new model and sample results).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix

Organization Meeting Vote

Name: _____ Date: _____

Question: **Would the idea of enforcing a time limit on finding a laboratory before reverting to a non-thesis be acceptable?**

Options: Please rank your choice 1 = favorite answer, 3 = least favorite answer. More than one favorite answer, each gets a "1".

_____ A) no

_____ B) yes, after their first semester if they do not have a laboratory they are reverting to a Non-Thesis option, No exceptions.

_____ C) yes, after their first semester if they do not have a laboratory they will have a 4 week (December) grace period to do an additional rotation, then be reverted if no laboratory is available. No exceptions.

_____ D) yes, after their first semester if they do not have a laboratory, they are reverting to a Non-Thesis option. Exceptions can be made on a case by case basis.

_____ E) yes, after their first semester if they do not have a laboratory they will have a 4 week (December) grace period to do an additional rotation, then be reverted if no laboratory is available. Exceptions can be made on a case by case basis.

_____ F) yes, I agree with the reverting a thesis student to non-thesis, but not in the time frames listed.

_____ G) abstain (no opinion on this subject).

Additional Notes to Aid in Answering the Question

We have three students that started in the fall with no laboratory. The reasons they do not have a laboratory are relevant but not necessarily for this vote. What is necessary is to say that they all can be reverted to Non-Thesis option despite the different reasons.

Organization Vote Results

Re: New PTX Policy LABORATORY ROTATION TIME LIMITS.

Pharmacology and toxicology Master of Science thesis option graduate students are required to take an Introduction to Research course in the fall semester of their first year. At the end of this course a student is expected to have a laboratory to do their thesis work. If a student does not have a laboratory by the end of fall semester of their first year it is expected that they do an extra rotation over December break (approximately 4 - 5 weeks). If at the end of that rotation they do not have a laboratory, they will revert to the non-thesis option.

The department is aware that extenuating circumstances may arise that make this policy difficult; therefore, we write into this policy that if warranted this policy can be overridden by committee decision on an individual case basis.

Options	Faculty members (Each column represents a different member)									#1 votes	Time limits. How long does a student have to find a laboratory before reverting to the non-thesis option.
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*		
a	1			3	3			1		2	No
b			3	1	3			3	2	1	Yes, Fall semester only
c		3	3	3	2	1		3		1	Yes, Fall semester + holiday
d		2	2	2	2			3	1	1	Yes, Fall semester + Exceptions
e		1	1	2	1			1	3	4	Yes, Fall semester + holiday + Exceptions
f			1	3	1			3		2	Yes, Fall semester, but different time
g			4	3	3		1			1	Abstain

Answered #1