Chapter Seven: Decision making model answers

Mini case 7(i): Ethical decision making model for social care provision in New Zealand

Discussion point

Is it appropriate to formulate a Code of Ethics to inform decision making in a profession such as social psychology?

After reading the chapter on decision making, students will be able to see that very few decisions can follow a strictly rational approach. In most situations the environment is characterised by uncertainty and information is likely to be limited. This is especially the case when dealing with the complexities of the human condition and interpersonal relationships. The profession of social psychology is about trying to understand and resolve the myriad social problems that can arise in this environment. At first glance it may appear that trying to formulate a code of ethics for decision making is a futile task, as the cases dealt with may have unique characteristics. The unstructured and non-programmed nature of decision making can work against a formal code that encapsulates the diversity of challenges faced by professionals.

There are also potential problems relating to the ethical dimension of the code. This implies that there exists an ethic that is acceptable to all those in the community. However, the community is likely to be comprised of different ethnic groups, demographics, values, beliefs and customs. A code of ethics may not be wholly inclusive of the diversity that characterises many communities. Nevertheless, a code of ethics for decision making for professional psychologists can set broad guidelines as to what is an acceptable or appropriate way to decide on how to respond to certain

situations and circumstances. It may be a valuable contribution based on past experience and knowledge that can be transferred to both existing staff and new recruits. If the limitations of the code are recognised, it may offer some insight into best practice that improves the quality of care provision.

Mini case questions and task

What are the main criticisms of the Code of Ethics for decision making designed for psychologists in New Zealand?

The main criticisms of the code of ethics for decision making are that it is culturally specific and not entirely inclusive of the diverse range of people who either receive or deliver social care. The code would have to be very extensive to reflect this diversity. The code was designed by social care professionals and reflects their perception of how ethical decisions should be taken in a range of circumstances. Although it provides a valuable contribution to knowledge and understanding, it is not wholly inclusive and, therefore, may not reflect the wide range of circumstances that professionals may be faced with. The other main criticism is that the code is designed on rational decision making principles. There is a systematic and logical approach to the decision making process that does not always play out in reality. Very often it is not possible to follow prescribed steps to resolving or dealing with social problems and, therefore, there has to be some recognition that when confronted with ethical dilemmas that social care professionals can use their judgement and discretion to make appropriate choices.

What types of decisions are psychologists most likely to make during the course of their work in the social care sector.

Psychologists are likely to make both programmed (structured) and non-programmed (unstructured) decision in the course of their duties. Some circumstances will be repetitive and routine in nature, such as the initial case briefing that outlines the type of case for care. Beyond that detail of the individual case can be distinct and unpredictable. Circumstances may change even in the course of the delivery of social care and will, therefore, exhibit distinctive characteristics that will require the care provider to make non-programmed decisions.

Are past decisions helpful as a guide to best practice in decision making by psychologists involved in the delivery of social care?

In all professions, the transfer of knowledge from stakeholders is a vital part of extending understanding of the specialism. Most professions have a formal mechanism for knowledge transfer and much of that knowledge will based on experience and practices that have occurred in the past. Anecdotal storytelling is an informal mechanism for achieving knowledge transfer and forms an important element of the culture within professions. Good and bad practice may be the subject of past experience that others can learn from and use as a basis for creating new ideas and practices that improves the service delivery.

Mini case 7(ii): Intuitive decision making at Intuit India

Discussion point

Is reliance on intuition more risky than an analytical approach to decision making?

The effectiveness of intuitive thinking depends on how closely attuned the person is to the environment and their own emotions. The risk of decision making is closely aligned to the ability of individuals to understand and act upon subconscious feelings or instincts that are heightened through a close engagement with the world around them. In this regard the risk factor can vary markedly. Even those with the emotional awareness to utilise intuitive thinking for decision making purposes will sometimes get it wrong, as the environment may change or the interpretation of 'gut feelings' may be imprecise. There is always the temptation to rely on whatever information is available and form judgements based on analysis of that information and/or past experience. This is often a means of minimising risk but is no panacea for the ambiguity that characterises most situations around which decisions have to be made. Often decision makers rely on a combination of intuition, analysis and experience.

Mini case questions

Why has it taken almost thirty years for the management of Intuit to introduce an intuitive aspect to their decision making?

The level of intuitive thinking that takes place in an organisation depends on a number of variables. For instance, the type of products or services produced and the form of production can determine the types of decisions that are made. In industrial settings that exhibit a high degree of precision

such as engineering or some sciences, invariably the reliance on analytical and technical input is higher. In others, such as the creative industries, the intuitive aspect may dominate. In the case of Intuit, the management built the company based on rational decision making processes where metrics and analysis formed the dominant means by which decisions were arrived at. However, as the management developed their understanding of the environment and the opportunities presented within it a more intuitive approach became possible. It probably took thirty years of experience before the founders fully trusted their instincts to make decisions based solely on this approach.

What were the main risks associated with the Intuit venture into the Indian farming marking?

The main risk of venturing into the Indian farming market was the unknown reaction of the farmers to the initiative that was proposed. The core target market was a constituency unfamiliar with modern knowledge transfer mechanisms and a culture based on subsistence farming. The risk was trusting in the farmers to embrace the knowledge created to improve their economic welfare. To mitigate against the risk in the first instance, the company delivered the knowledge manually rather than through electronic means, the access to which would have been limited for farmers. The other main risk was that of culture. The company had to set up a trading subsidiary in India to allow local managers to explain the initiative and to communicate their ideas to the farming community. This was an important step as the risk associated with overseas managers attempting to bridge the cultural gap would have been too great.

Is intuition only valuable when considering issues that are culturally specific to experience?

As intuition is an intangible quality it is difficult to precisely determine the origins of it. Intuitive thought emerges from a combination of factors working together in the subconscious mind. These may include emotional stimuli, environmental influences and awareness, education, interpersonal relationships, life experience, skills, and, of course culture, among others. Each has a role to play in developing the intuitive aspect of our mental agility and skills. A heightened understanding and awareness of a situation or set of circumstances may be enhanced by a close cultural alignment with them. Very often it is this that makes relevant and contextual the instincts displayed by intuitive decision makers. Developing intuition in an environment that is culturally ambiguous is likely to constrain that development until the subtle nuances and characteristics of that culture are better understood and assimilated.

Mini case 7(iii): The Loya Jirga of Afghanistan

Discussion point

Has the *Jirga* system more to do with maintaining an ancient tradition than operating an effective mechanism for decision making?

Afghanistan is an ancient land comprising many different tribes and traditions. Each tribe is fiercely independent but recognises that there are some issues that require consensus for the effective administration of the country as a whole. Tradition does play a key role in informing the dominant

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culture among the tribal regions. However, this is a common feature in developed as well as developing regions of the globe. The Jirga system plays two key roles. Firstly, it helps to maintain the cultural link with the ancestors and the traditions and customs that define the culture. Secondly, it helps with the political and administrative running of the country. These two roles are intertwined and help to maintain the dominant culture that characterises the people of Afghanistan.

Mini case questions

What are the main advantages of the *Loya Jirga* system of decision making?

The main advantage of the Jirga system is that a consensus can be reached to give administrators and politicians a mandate to act in an official capacity when making decisions. It bestows authority on those entrusted with decision making on behalf of the people of Afghanistan. As such it acts as a unifying and cohesive force that helps to bring a measure of stability to a land traditionally characterized by tensions between different factions of society.

Is the *Jirga* democratic in its decision making process? Explain your answer.

The Jirga is not entirely democratic in its format as there are sections of society that are not represented in the discussions that take place. The Jirga is mostly the preserve of tribal leaders, religious leaders, scholars or professionals, all of whom will be male. The female section of society is not represented and, therefore, the system is not egalitarian. In fact, the stakeholder group that sits in the Jirga is relatively small and representative of dominant groups in Afghan society. However, in terms of the process of decision making, there is an opportunity for all participants to air their views

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and contribute to debates on an equal footing. In this regard, the procedural structure of the Jirga can be viewed as democratic.

What type of management style is evident in the decision making processes of the *Jirga*?

The Jirga exhibits a consensual management style whereby a wide range of views are expressed but with an ultimate aim of reaching consensus. Consensus is arrived at after exhaustive discussions and can emerge from a majority view of participants. Although marked by vigorous debate, the emphasis on consensus is a feature of the way in which the process is managed. Using the model outlined in Figure 7f, there is some link to conceptual style of management. The conceptual style maintains a broad outlook and considers many alternatives in making decisions. This is a key feature of the Jirga debates. In a region characterized by sparse populations spread over rugged terrain, the reliability of information is limited. Necessarily, there is a high level of tolerance for ambiguity.

Case study: The decision making process at the European Patent Office

Discussion points

Does the persuasive aspect of patent applications undermine the robustness of the process?

There are two opposing views on this matter. Technocrats believe that the patent process should be free of any debate and discussion between examiners and applicants (or more likely their legal representatives, in the

form of patent attorneys). They believe that the decision should be based on the examination, evaluation and expert opinion of those charged with the duty of making judgements on patent awards. The opposite view is that applicants should have an opportunity to present their case orally as a supplement to the written submission. In many cases the written application that describes the unique and inventive step of the innovation is extremely technical and detailed. Often, it is argued, an oral explanation can provide further clarity for the benefit of the examiners. There are opportunities in place for applicants to provide oral support for their application through telephone or interview. This is seen by most as an important channel of communication that helps examiners make decisions.

Questions and tasks

Identify the parts of the patent application process that aligns to the rational decision making model.

The parts of the patent process that follow a rational pathway are the recording of the patent contents, the filing and examination of the patent application, and the prior art search. The patent application procedure begins with the formal submission whereby the basis upon which the patent application is submitted is presented. The second stage is the formal examination of the application. This is where the examiners check that the application meets all the primary criteria for consideration. The third stage of the decision making process is the search for prior art. Prior art refers to all the information that is in the public domain in any form prior to the date of the patent submission that may have a bearing on the originality of the patent's claim. Any invention that is discovered to exhibit 'prior art' will not be considered valid for an award of a patent. At this stage the examiners study the application as a whole in terms of the claim, the description, and any drawings that support the application claim. This part of the process follows a distinctly rational process of decision making. That is, key concepts are

identified, documents are searched, a technical classification is assigned to the invention, a more refined search is undertaken, and finally an evaluation is given. Examiners then decide whether or not to proceed. If no prior art is revealed then the application goes forward for more substantive examination where the decision making process incorporates a more subjective characteristic and involves expert opinion.

What other types of decision making are evident in the patent application process?

Some aspects of the patent decision making process are routine and structured, whereas others are unique and unstructured. Add to this the right of applicants to request an interview with examiners and it is easy to see how the whole process moves on from a rational and structured process to one that involves advocacy, argument, and persuasion. A skilled practitioner needs to be aware of what is considered common knowledge in a particular technical field and have access to everything in the state of the art. However, examiners are limited by bounded rationality. That is, they only have a finite amount of knowledge that they can absorb and store as tacit knowledge. Thus, in many cases, there is a threshold of acceptability that defines their decision making. Here, a satisficing aspect to the process is evident whereby the applicant has provided enough evidence to merit the benefit of any doubt held by examiners. If that threshold is not met, then an award will not be made. It is worth noting that these thresholds may differ between different examiners as they may perceive the evidence from different perspectives. Given these limitations, it is clear that there is an administrative type of decision making evident in the patent process.

Why is there no global decision making system for patent applications?

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The system of awarding patents for inventions stretches back many centuries and has become an integral part of many countries' policies of encouraging and managing innovation. Although there have been formal bodies set up to try to harmonise the administration of intellectual property in generally, and patenting in particular (for example, the European patent Office and the World Intellectual Property Organisation), many countries prefer to retain an autonomous and independent system which helps retain control. The United States and Japan are two countries which operate a wholly independent system - and as leading locations of innovation, view this as a strategic economic advantage. There has been, and continues to be, dialogue between countries to work together to smooth the process of administering intellectual property rights in an increasingly globalised economy where innovations may be a result of collaborations by international partners. However, full global harmonisation of laws governing patents and other intellectual property is unlikely.

Chapter questions and tasks

Identify and describe an occasion when you have decided to act on a 'hunch' or an intuitive feeling that it is the correct thing to do.

You can answer this task according to your own experience. Intuitive thinking may have helped you to make a decision regarding the place or what to study, the types of relationships you want to form with others, career choices, spending habits, and so on. Remember that intuitive thinking is subconscious rather than analytical. Your response should reflect a 'gut instinct' to act or decide in a particular way.

Outline the seven main steps in the rational decision making process.

Stage 1:   identifying the problem (or the opportunity).

Stage 2:   gather information

Stage 3:   analysis of the situation to reveal alternatives

Stage 4:   develop options.

Stage 5:   evaluate alternatives

Stage 6:   select a preferred decision

Stage 7:   implement the decision.

Identify the main difference between the rational and administrative models of decision making.

The rational decision making model is one based on consistent choices designed to maximise economic returns. The administrative model of decision making is one that recognises the limitations of decision making in ambiguous and unclear situations when information is incomplete.

Give three examples of potentially politically motivated decisions in organisations.

- Resource allocations to different departments
- Delegation of power and authority
- The award of status or other rewards