

SPC Exam 3

Chapter 18: Functional Perspective on Group Decision Making

Of Rany Hirokawa and Dennis Gouran

- Group interaction has a positive effect on the final decision.
- Seek quality solutions
- Desire decisions that are appropriate

Functional perspective: a prescriptive approach that describes and predicts task-group performance when four communication functions are fulfilled.

- Specifies what communication must accomplish for jointly made decisions to be wise.

Four Functions of Effective Decision Making

- The decision making process needs to fulfill four task requirements if members are to reach a high-quality solution.
- These conditions are called **requisite functions:** requirements for positive group outcome; problem analysis, goal setting, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of pluses and minuses for each.

1. Analysis of the Problem

- Group members take a realistic look at current conditions.
- **Problem analysis:** determining the nature, extent, and cause of the problem facing the group

2. Goal Setting

- **Goal setting:** establishing criteria by which to judge proposed solutions
- If the group fails to satisfy this task requirement, it's likely that the decision will be driven by power or passion rather than reason.
- "You don't know you're winning if you don't keep score"

3. Identification of Alternatives

- Identification of alternatives: generation of options to sufficiently solve the problem
- "if there aren't a lot of ways to fix the problem, the corresponding possibility of finding the acceptable answer will be low."
- Combination of ideas is made possible

4. Evaluation of Negative and Positive Characteristics.

- A point-by-point comparison that doesn't take place automatically. Often need one group member to remind others to consider the benefits and costs.
- **Evaluation of positive and negative characteristics:** testing the relative merits of each option against the criteria selected; weighing the benefits and the costs

- Some groups have a negative bias, in that spotting the downside of each alternative is more important than identifying its positive qualities.

Prioritizing the Four Functions

- How do we address the four requisite functions in a logical progression?
- Groups that successfully resolve especially difficult problems usually take a common decision-making path.
- Studies show that **evaluation of negative consequences of alternative solutions** is by far the MOST crucial to ensure a quality decision.
- Progression: Problem analysis → goal setting → identifying alternatives → evaluating positive and negative characteristics of each alternative → final choice

The Role of Communication in Fulfilling the Functions

- Verbal interaction makes it possible for members to
 1. Distribute and pool information
 2. Catch and remedy errors
 3. Influence each other

Ivan Steiner claimed that:

Actual Group Productivity = Potential Productivity - Losses Due to Process

Hirokawa and Gouran outline three types of communication in decision-making groups:

1. **Promotive:** interaction that moves the group along the goal path by calling attention to one of the four requisite decision making functions.
2. **Disruptive:** interaction that diverts, retards, or frustrates group members' ability to achieve the four task functions
3. **Counteractive:** interaction that members use to get the group back on track.

Note that most group decision-making is disruptive. Someone has to say something counteractive that will get them back on track.

Function-Oriented Interaction Coding System (FOICS): a tool to record and classify the function of utterances during a group's discussion.

- Requires researchers to categorize each **functional utterance:** an uninterrupted statement of a single member that appears to perform a specific function within the group interaction process.
- Raters are asked to make two judgments:
 - Which of the four requisite functions does an utterance address?

- Does the remark promote, disrupt, or counteract the group's focus on that function?
- This process is fraught with difficulty
- A single comment may serve multiple functions
- Comments may have the hidden power to disrupt

Thoughtful Advice For Those Who Know They Are Right

- Promote clear thinking—don't be convinced of your opinions without evidence
- **Reflective thinking:** thinking that favors rational consideration over intuitive hunches or pressure from those with clout.

Ethical Reflection:

- Jurgen Habermas states that people within a given culture can pretty much agree on what good they want to accomplish
- **Discourse ethics:** Jurgen Habermas' vision of the ideal speech situation in which diverse participants could rationally reach a consensus on universal ethical standards.
- **Ideal Speech Situation:** a discourse on ethical accountability in which discussants represent all who will be affected by the decision, pursue discourse in a spirit of seeking the common good, and are committed to finding universal standards
- If these three requirements are met, Habermas thinks the validity of an ethical consensus can be reached.
 1. **Requirement for access:** all people affected by the ethical norm being debated can attend and be heard, regardless of their status.
 2. **Requirement for argument:** all participants are expected to exchange their points of view in the spirit of genuine reciprocity and mutual understanding. There aren't merely trying to advance their own interests.
 3. **Requirement for justification:** everyone is committed to a standard of universalization.

Critique:

- Extremely highly regarded theory.
- Some research advocated adding a historical function that requires the group to talk about how past decisions were made.

Chapter 19: Symbolic Convergence Theory

Of Ernest Bormann

- Robert Bales, Harvard social psychologist, discovered that **dramatizing** was a significant type of communication that often fostered group cohesiveness.
- Bormann continued with his studies, and set forth the central explanatory principle of SCT: **sharing group fantasies creates symbolic convergence.**