

# Enhancing Work and Non-Work Plans and Decisions

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## Abstract

This paper describes a concept that addresses the quality of those aspects of plans and decisions, which impact on stakeholders. It thus connects to all the topics relevant for the conference: Organizational Studies, International Studies, Strategic Management, Technology Management and Marketing Management. It also has application to many other disciplines and professional fields, even to hobby and family matters.

When the issues exposed by the concept are kept in mind, more relevant matters are likely to be thought of. Fewer matters are overlooked that deserve consideration. Plan/decision quality and outcomes are thereby enhanced.

The paper also describes pilots and challenges pertaining to a contemplated study that is intended to validate the hypothesis that consideration of a few standard groups of issues, almost all of which are universally relevant to work plans and decisions, and most are relevant to non-business environments, will bring plans and decisions that consider more of the relevant issues than would otherwise be given thought.

In addition to the description of the study, a specific set of eight groups of issues is offered as foundation for modifications to better fit the needs of users, and possibly for further research. These eight groups are comprehensive, solidly based on the relevant leadership, management, motivation, decision-making, and related literature. They have been informally tested in a wide range of venues. They are flexible so they adjust to the respective situation and culture.

If, as expected, the hypothesis will be confirmed, the article predicts that a segment on planning and decision-making issues is likely to be added to all professional programs.

## Introduction

There is much in the literature on management, leadership, motivation, decision-making and other relevant disciplines, on the complexities connected with successful leadership considering the need to adapt to the specific situation. In light of the infinite number of possible situations it is obvious that it is practically impossible to achieve empirical validation of a leadership theory in its totality. That leaves leadership education dependent on descriptions of theories, without a clear practical edge similar to the prescriptive benefits of professional practice guidelines or formulae that are part of the educational process in most disciplines.

A limited attempt at empirical validation of a single practical dimension of leadership that is based on the theoretical foundation provided by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958), can be found in the work of Victor Vroom and his associates (Vroom and Yetton, 1974; Vroom and Jago, 1988; and Vroom 2003). It is in the form of a 'Normative Model of Leadership Styles' that concentrates solely on a limited number of participation options specified in the model. Though reasonably successful, the model considers only the leader role of a person in an organization with at least limited supervisory responsibilities. It does not fit any other leadership role such as that of a participant in a meeting, or that of a manager of a project, or that of a parent. Nor does it include all aspects of participation since it ignores the characteristics of the individuals to whom part of the plan-development or decision-making authority has been delegated. Still, Vroom's work has demonstrated that limited aspects or perspectives of planning and decision-making behavior can be validated. When his group's work is looked at with a critical eye, it becomes apparent that the output was a set of issues to consider when selecting participants. That then raises the prospect that progress could be made on investigating the impact of plan preparation and decision-making on individual and organizational behavior and performance, if research would focus sharply on one or on a limited number of dimensions.

First, though, it is necessary to define what is involved in work and personal life plans and decisions. To do that it should be recognized that there are two distinct domains that need to be considered. One is the technical or functional domain that includes all issues unique to the field or discipline. These are the issues that are covered in the respective educational programs and are sharpened in practice. They exist in all professions and technical work, including medicine, engineering, education, architecture, physics research, and in management fields such as marketing, MIS and human resources. They also can be identified in non-professional work such as that of repair mechanics, salespeople and office workers. These technical issues are considered in decisions pertaining to the respective field.

The other domain encompasses all issues that impact on stakeholders. Issues in this domain apply to all plans and decisions – those of managers who work with staff members, managers of functions who work without staff and even to people who champion an idea or cause in a meeting or elsewhere. Interestingly, many of the issues in this domain also apply to private-life decisions, including family management and volunteer work.

In a general sense, the two domains can be depicted on a graph that resembles the Managerial Grid (Blake and Mouton, 1964 and 1968). While the Grid has Concern for People and Concern for Production on its axes, for the purposes of the domains, the technical one would

be on the horizontal axis and the other one on the vertical axis. If one interprets the popular literature depiction of managers in general, many of whom are considered autocratic, insensitive, and focused on technical issues, most employees rate them in the upper left quadrant. However, managers who are sensitive to the issues in the non-technical domain would come closer to the desirable upper right hand corner of the chart that represents high competence in considering both domains. As becomes clear when the domains are investigated, there is no sharp dividing line; some overlap exists and there is no harm in that – it helps to ensure that fewer matters will be overlooked during planning and other decision-making.

Awareness of the critical role of thorough consideration of all relevant issues is the key to helping learners prepare better plans and make better decisions, in part by building useful bridges from awareness of theories to effective practice. When they have learned to think of all issues, at least in broad outline form, they will overlook less that is relevant. That will be true in real life and in vicarious situations such as case studies and other interactive learning techniques. The issues permit evaluation of the quality of plans and decisions while they are being made, and not primarily on the basis of results. The latter, after all, come after some delay and, moreover can be greatly affected by external circumstances, thus blurring the quality of the plan and decision.

### **Identifying Issue Groups in the Non-Technical Domain**

If one looks at what competent managers and professionals do, some functions would seem obvious. They have to communicate effectively, they have to arrange for appropriate participation by others, and in other ways consider the satisfaction of stakeholders. Often they have to think of competence – their skills, and those of team members and others, to understand and to effectively discharge any responsibility that was accepted. Then there is a need to consider cooperation and coordination with respect to whatever is to be accomplished by the team or group. That, in turn may involve joint establishment of goals or objectives. There are other functions that may have to be considered, especially by team managers and parents, such as reviewing progress and bringing common views on norms.

When professional education is seen from that perspective – from the need or desirability to provide guidance toward effective performance in these areas, then a list of issues to consider can be developed. The benefit of such as list in leading toward better plans and decisions is that it can be tested by research. Once the improvement in the quality of plans and decisions that one group of issues can bring has been confirmed, then the benefits of other groups of issues can be evaluated, gradually leading to a comprehensive view of effective planning and decision-making, and in effect, of effective leadership.

A research project to confirm the benefit of attention to a set of issue groups is currently under development. Several pilots using slightly different approaches to achieve solid objectivity in evaluation have already been conducted. The results are very encouraging. Plans are being made for obtaining funding, and for identifying faculty members in different geographical areas and disciplines, especially in management, and organizational as well as educational leadership, but also in technical professions such as engineering and IT, who would be interested in becoming study investigators. As mentioned previously, the project involves a survey intended to confirm the hypothesis that consideration of a few standard groups of issues almost all of

which are universally relevant to work plans and decisions, and most are relevant to non-business environments, will bring plans and decisions that consider more relevant issues than would otherwise be given thought. When the issues exposed by the concept are kept in mind, fewer matters are overlooked that deserve consideration. Plan/decision quality and outcomes are thereby enhanced.

Confirmation of this hypothesis could then lead to further research to validate each one of the issue groups. Even before completion of such far more extensive studies, the results may bring addition of a course segment on the use of groups of issues in key courses in all almost all disciplines. The reason for this broad statement is that almost all professionals develop plans and make decisions that should consider the non-technical issues. However, many, if not most practitioners, often overlook much because they are likely to be sharply focused on the technical domain issues.

One set of issue groups for the non-technical domain is being used in the pilots and is planned for use in the study itself. It is described in a book for general audiences to be published late in 2007 that was used as a text in a graduate course at Kean University. As explained in Appendix B, the concept on which the issue groups are based has been shown as highly effective, and useful, in many different ways and venues.

### **Study Procedure**

(A still not finalized draft of the case for the study, and a description of the very brief outline of the issue groups to be used in the study follow this Study Procedure)

1. Identification and selection of ten faculty members, teaching a variety of professional courses including some in management fields, in several institutions, who are willing, and approved by their departments, to conduct the study in their respective courses and who have obtained IRB approval, if required by their institution.
2. Comments on the contemplated case that is focused sharply on plans in the work and home environment, each one potentially benefiting from consideration of relevant issues in the following areas:
  - comprehensive communications
  - appropriate participation
  - satisfaction of stakeholders
  - competence assessment and development
  - possible use of goals, and their quality

To avoid making the student decisions and the analysis of the case too complicated for the brief sessions where it will be used, three of the issue groups will not be included. These three are:

- coordination and cooperation between individuals and teams
- identification of norms and steps to bring team-wide uniformity
- performance reviews and performance evaluation

3. Finalization of the investigator protocol, the case and student instructions, all in cooperation with investigators. For this purpose, the words 'plan and decision guidelines' will be used instead of the more difficult concept of 'issue groups'
4. Conduct of a web-based brief seminar with the investigators to respond to questions and to confirm understanding of the course material to be presented and of the study protocol
5. Use of the case in each class prior to any discussion of guidelines.
6. At least a week later, a very brief presentation in each class to explain the 'guidelines' and discussion of student questions, followed by a second use of the case study on conclusion of the explanation of the guidelines
7. Analysis of the results

### **Draft of Case and Student Instructions**

There are two scenarios in the case, both facing Joan, the principal character. One is for a business situation and the other for a family challenge. As shown by the questions at the end of the scenarios, students are asked to enter what they would do if they were Joan.

Student instructions:

Please read the two scenarios below. Then answer the questions given after the second scenario on the blank student response sheet.

All answers are confidential. Do not write your name on the answer page.

You are not required to participate, but we hope you will.

Please take no more than 15 minutes to read the scenario and make your selections. Then turn in these pages.

Scenario 1:

Joan, an executive in charge of MIS program development at ABC, a medium sized wholesaler of consumer products is contemplating difficult decisions. The company has recently acquired a smaller company with a different product line that sells partly in the same market and partly in one not previously served by ABC. To simplify the transition to a unified company, a computer program for the two sales departments was developed to replace the incompatible programs of the two companies. During pilot testing it became apparent that access might be cumbersome for the representatives who will likely complain. Management would like to have it working as soon as possible.

Yesterday, Max, one of the three system designers suggested a completely different design that he thought would eliminate the problem.

Before reviewing his suggestion, Joan asked him to explain it to the other two system designers to obtain their views and comments. She will call a meeting for the next day to lay the foundation for a decision on what would be best to do.

Max called early in the day to tell John that one of the two designers thought that his idea certainly deserved a trial while the other one was more reserved and was wondering whether the

benefits would outweigh the problems related to the delay of at least two weeks before possible implementation, and the possibility of problems emerging.

#### Scenario 2:

Joan has another decision to make. She and her husband recently purchased a home and moved there from the apartment where they had lived since they were married. It was time for that step, they thought, because the first child is 5 years old, they hope to have another one soon, and they want more room. The house they bought is a resale; the kitchen floor is old, the wall paint needs refreshing, and the counter top is shabby. The dishwasher, microwave, range and oven are limited in their functions and look like they will not last much longer. Joan convinced her husband, who wanted to wait, that all this work should be done right away. They have separate assets (bank and small stockbroker accounts) and a joint account for day-to-day living expenses, property taxes and insurance to which both contribute regularly, and for special needs such as income taxes. All four parents are alive. His parents, who are in a better financial situation than hers, gave them the mortgage they needed, at a better rate than a bank.

Please address the questions below on the blank paper you have been given, with bullet points (not in essay form):

1. What are three or four things you would consider, and do, as you contemplate the computer program challenge, if you were in Joan's shoes?
2. What are three or four things you would consider, and do, as you contemplate the kitchen renovation challenge, if you were in Joan's shoes? Do not focus solely on cost and related money issues, but also do not ignore them.

#### **Explanation of the 'Planning and Decision Guidelines'**

Students would either receive a copy of the explanation below prior to the second time they would face the scenarios, or would see it on a screen. They would be given an opportunity to ask for clarification where the guidelines are not clear to them.

#### Planning and Decision Guidelines:

With respect to any plan or decision, the following should be considered – please think of these five 'guidelines' as you write what you would do if you were in Joan's two situations:

- **Communications**, which refers to what should be communicated by whom, to whom, and when
- **Participation in plans and decisions**; that refers to who should be consulted or participate in the decision or plan development, when and how much weight should be given to that person or group's preferences/suggestions
- **Competence use and development** refers to a review of any competence development steps (training) that may be necessary so everyone involved in implementing the decision or plan is fully capable

- **Satisfaction of stakeholders** refers to the reaction (favorable or unfavorable) of the people involved or affected by the plan or decision and the need to consider how it could be improved to achieve as favorable a reaction as possible
- The **use and quality of Goals** refers to the possible benefit of setting goals for all or part of a plan.

After this explanation, students would be asked to again enter the answers to the questions.

As the case demonstrates, guidelines can help improve the effectiveness of participative/interactive learning devices such as cases, simulations, and internet search techniques that are currently the primary roads to help learners bridge from theories to practice.

The eight groups of issues suggested above are based on the major responsibilities of managers and leaders (whether they are in charge of teams departments or entire organizations, work alone on projects, help to make meetings effective, champion a cause on and off the job, or even make decisions in family affairs). They are solidly based on the management, leadership, motivation, and decision-making literature. Unfortunately space does not permit to discuss these foundations or even provide a comprehensive list of references. These can be found in Rausch and Washbush (1998).

The eight groups represent only an initial conceptual model that should be modified and adapted, or even replaced with another model relevant to the needs and views of users. They consider planning and decision-making as systems that are thorough only when they consider all relevant issues, and do not concentrate on only a limited few areas such as those that are related to where a problem or challenge might have first manifested itself. They should be seen, as a skeleton system that hides many layers of meaning that can be exposed gradually in a learning program, or that practitioners can slowly learn as they use them. In addition to the direct learning that occurs when guidelines are used (groups of issues are considered), is the desire or need to gain deeper insight in the issues that they stimulate. Each of the groups will be better understood when learning leads to a more thorough perspective on all the detailed issues that deserve consideration in a specific plan, action and/or decision. Effectively considering all the issues, in the final analysis, is a major component of quality, and the foundation of competence in all activities and behaviors. Though the groups start with simple statements, they can serve as a springboard to all the knowledge behind them, including all the relevant literature, and related skills.

No matter what theories one considers as most useful guidance for the behavior of managers, leaders, and other planners and decision makers, the perspective discussed here will be in line with the theories' conclusions. That is even true if one believes that several or all can contribute valuable insights.

## Challenges in the Analysis of Results

1. The first set of analyses was done by the author of this paper, based on purely subjective evaluation of each student statement, giving credit for every word, idea or thought that indicted consideration of one of the groups of issues. (See Appendix A). In the first pilot, the business scenario received a 3.9 score for the second/post session as compared to a 0.4 for the first one. The home scenario was even stronger: 1.8 vs. 0.0 In the second pilot, the business scenario received a 5.5 score for the second/post session as compared to a 2.19 for the first one. The home scenario again was also even stronger: 3.85 vs. 0.63

Despite honest effort to avoid any bias, the results undoubtedly reflect, at least minimally, a tendency to interpret some responses as being based purely on technical considerations, when the student may have had a broader perspective. Still the results were so overwhelmingly skewed, that any bias that might have been introduced by this approach would not have materially changed the results of the evaluation,

2. In an attempt to find a more purely objective approach to evaluation, key words were culled from the student responses. We are now trying to find a computer algorithm or program that would permit automatic evaluation of the use of these key words. The list of words is in Appendix C, together with a sample of student responses themselves.

3. Another attempt involved giving students 14 choices from which to pick 5. Unfortunately that gave them information about alternatives that they probably would not have thought of without that information – so the results were badly biased.

4. One more approach is to use two or more evaluators with only one knowledgeable in the issue groups while the other(s) have only very casual acquaintance with the two domains and the five issue groups (hardly more than the students). One such analysis was done by one evaluator. Space does not permit showing the same detail in the appendix as is shown for the analysis from 1. above. However, the results did not stray far from the initial analysis that may have been more biased as a result of the evaluator's more thorough acquaintance with issue groups. In this analysis, the business scenario received a 5.8 score for the second/post session as compared to a 3.9 for the first one. The home scenario was also even stronger: 3.6 vs 1.2.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, if the contemplated study does, as expected, fully validate the effect of a set of guidelines on plan and decision quality, then it is obvious that such guidelines should become an integral part of all professional education, and especially leadership and management education. It might even be desirable to introduce them late in selected public school programs. The sooner students are exposed to the groups of issues, the more likely that repetition of the topic in later courses will stimulate the development of habits to glance at them whenever a relevant situation arises. That would lead to higher levels of competence, better resolutions of conflicts, greater cooperation, and greater satisfaction from work and in life.

The increasing complexity of work and life we will face in the future will make it imperative that decisions be of high quality. As with quality in all matters, this means that more attention should be given to ensure that learners in educational and professional development programs gain awareness of how to consider all relevant issues in every significant decision and plan. They therefore need guidance in where to look for those issues, and then are given a model to follow. An approach to planning and decision-making such as the eight sets of guidelines that will be used in the study would then gradually permeate their common sense. This approach would require a minor, but clear shift in professional education and especially in management and leadership education, to a new road that adds a segment on prescriptive guidelines such as those recommended here.

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## Appendix A

Preliminary Results, 1st Pilot of Research Survey  
(letters represent identification of the different student papers)

Student response evaluation for each issue group:

- 3 - clearly identified
- 2 - neither clear nor vaguely identified (implied?)
- 1 - vaguely identified

Original (date not known) n = 10

Business scenario

Communications

Participation

Competence

Satisfaction j3, 3

Goals i1, 1

4/10=0.4

Home scenario

Communications

Participation

Competence

Satisfaction

Goals 0

0/10=0

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Second (6/21/07) n = 10

Business scenario

Communications a3, b3, c3, d3, g2, 14/5

Participation a1, c3, d2, e3, j2, 11/5

Competence a2, b2, f3, 7/3

Satisfaction e3, f1, j2, 6/3

Goals ?1 1

39/10

Home scenario

Communications a1, b3, c3, d3, 10/4

Participation a1, c2, j3, 6/3

Competence

Satisfaction

Goals b1, ?1 2

18/10

The business scenario received a 3.9 score for the second/post session as compared to a 0.4 for the first one. The home scenario was even stronger: 1.8 vs 0.0

### Preliminary Results, 2nd Pilot of Research Survey

Original (date not known) n = 16

Business scenario

Communications a2, f2, g1, i3, j2, l1, 11/6

Participation a2, b1, c1, e3, h1, m1, p3, 12/7

Competence b3, d1, g1, i1, 6/4

Satisfaction c3, k1, p2, 6/3

Goals 0

35/16=2.19

Home scenario		
Communications		0
Participation	f2, g1, j2,	5/3
Competence	c1, h1, n1,	3/3
Satisfaction	c2,	2/1
Goals		0
		10/16=0.63

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Second (6/21/07)

Business scenario n = 12

Communications	a3, d3, e3, h3, j3, k2, l3,	20/7
Participation	b3, c3, d1, e3, g3, j2, k3, l2,	20/8
Competence	a1, c3, d3, f3, h3, j3,	16/6
Satisfaction	b3, e3, l3,	9/3
Goals	k3,	1/1
		66/12=5.5

Home scenario

Communications	a3, d1, l2,	6/3
Participation	a3, c3, g2, j3, k3, l2,	16/6
Competence	e1, f2, j2, k2,	7/4
Satisfaction	b2, k3, l3,	8/3
Goals	j3, l3	6/2
		43/12=3.5

The business scenario received a 5.5 score for the second/post session as compared to a 2.19 for the first one. The home scenario was even stronger: 3.85 vs 0.63

## Appendix B

While no formal research has been conducted to validate the model, informal validation occurred:

- in management seminars for public and private organizations, including the American Management Association and the Federal Office of Personnel Management, Cabrini Hospitals, the Federal Prison System, the Girl Scouts, JCPenney, and USAir. In addition to the publication of the initial version of the concept in Heyel (1982) and in General Electric's handout to managers in their programs, two books have been published on the concept: Rausch (1978) and Rausch & Washbush (1998), that were used in these programs.
- in these programs and in innumerable other situations, planners and decision makers who have revisited a previous situation with the use of the model have, almost without exception, found that they would have included more relevant aspects and addressed more issues deserving consideration than had been considered. The same is true of individuals who have reviewed a plan or decision that is being made without the model and that is ready for implementation.

- in presentations of the concept at various academic conferences including the Academy of Management, OBTS, Association of Management/IAoM, and the Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management without any conceptual objections.
- as a result of three editions of Management in the Fire Service, (Didactic Systems 1977, and Carter & Rausch and 1989 and 1999) that apply the concept to fire departments, and that have been used widely in many states, as a foundation for promotional exams. In almost 30 years since the initial publication, no conceptual objections have been raised by instructors in fire service academies.
- during five years of testing and polishing a third version of the concept in a university text, in graduate level evening classes where employed students did not voice any concerns with the concept.

The model emerged from what the author has learned while being a practicing manager at a high level in two companies with about 500 employees each, for about 20 years, and in his own much smaller one. It reflects the experience of more than three decades of manager-and-leader-learning-needs-analyses, during design and conduct of management development programs, including highly interactive simulations (that require feedback on quality of decisions). It represents the reflection, discipline, and learning from others, that comes when writing and rewriting books, papers and articles on the leadership aspect of management, either alone or jointly with co-authors. Editing of special journal issues on leadership, and teaching of leadership in management courses at the graduate level added further dimensions.

## Appendix C

Key words selected from student responses for analysis purposes

**Communications:** all participation items, communicate, (someone) must communicate, notify, inform, communicate back, communicate with others, update, ask, relate (transmit) information, tell,

**Participation:** interview, consult, compared by, create a team/group, ask, call to meeting, face-to-face, come to a common ground, convince, agree, present, hear/get opinions, participation, jump the gun?, test, ask opinion, consensus, decision weight, disagreements, collectively, decide jointly (together, stated or implied), they think, advice, get perspectives, brainstorming,

**Competence:** fix problems, qualified, understand (easily), capable, responsible, feasible?, resolve disagreements, training, research capabilities, specialists, supervision, strength, deficiencies, expert/expertise, skills, abilities, knowledge,

**Satisfaction:** interest of stakeholders, easiest user interface, satisfied, value everyone (people) (on the team), easiest (to use), fulfill requirements, integration, expectations, best interest, inconvenience, best interest, stakeholders, feel, impact on personal life, benefit (who), satisfied, contribute, happy, content

**Goals:** plan, goal, effectiveness, efficiency, evaluate goal, right path, analyze?, desired outcome, profitable, expectations, challenge, contingency plan, improve, expectations, define objectives

Sample student responses (business scenario):

- talk to all the designers and ask them what they think
- delay implementation of the new program until a decision is made -streamline existing computer program
- 1: Why are the two opinions from the two system designers conflicting? And what were their reasons for each opinion?
- 2: Can the designers reach a single decision in a timely manner?
- 3: How immediately is the program going to be necessary, how long before we can't work without it?
  - \* Consider what aspects make that program function/dysfunction
  - \* Come up with solutions to fix problems in the program, or to substitute for the program
  - \* Make Pros and Cons of the newly presented design, and compare with the two old designs
  - try to get input from those who will be using the program
  - bring in all 3 system designers and have them discuss with the board what they think
  - try to figure out what would be better for the long run, not worrying whether it will delay time in the present
  - \* Consider if the benefits of implementing the computer program change would be worth the delay and the potential problems.
  - \* Take the proposed changes to the representatives to see if the new design would even be an improvement.
  - \* Consider the possibility of making changes to improve the current design instead of completely redoing the entire design.
  - \* Who is the better researcher?
  - \* How much money can I lose?
  - \* What the benefits and problems are?
  - \* I would have a meeting with Max and the other two system designers, not just ask them to talk to one another.
  - \* I would see if the third system designer could be convinced to participate in the new plan.
  - \* I would make sure that the new system design in fact eliminates the problem and does not introduce new problems.