

THE SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS

Etleva LESKAJ

*Tirana University, Tirana, Albania
etlevaleskaj@gmail.com*

Vasilika KUME

*Tirana University, Tirana, Albania
vasilika.kume@unitir.edu.al*

Eglantina ZYKA

*Tirana University, Tirana, Albania
eglazyka@yahoo.fr*

Abstract

In this article will be treated different skills for public administrators, during the process of decision making, which affect the effectiveness of their decisions, and thus will also affect the fulfillment of the objectives of the organizations they lead. The main purpose of the article is to identify the skills that demonstrate public administrators during decision making in order to define how good are their decision making process. On the basis of secondary and primary research, the authors would discuss the findings in order to identify the problems faced during these processes of decision-making public administrators.

Keywords: Decision making, Skills of effective decision making, Public administrators.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations with public features, are limited when making strategic choices about them. Decision making in a public organization is subject of limited mandates. Limited legislative mandates among other things, limit the budgets, which restricts or prohibits public sector decision makers, to spend financial resources in order to gather information, for an effective decision-making. A major concern in management has been to understand and improve decision making. (Briggs I, Myers, I. 1962). There have been two approaches to management decision making (Huber, 1980). The first is concerned with development and application of normative decision rules based on formal logic derived from economics or statistics. The second involves descriptive accounts of how people actually go about making judgments, decisions, and choices. In fact making decision in management has a significant role as Peter Drucker says, 90 percent of activities in management is decision making.

2. THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Identify the problem or opportunity

The first step in the decision making process, should be to look more for decision-making opportunities than for problems. A problem occurs when organizational accomplishment is less than established goals. An opportunity exists when managers see potential accomplishment that exceeds specified current goals. (Daft R., 2005).

Develop alternatives

A problem can usually be solved in any of a number of ways. The choices that the decision maker has to decide on are alternatives. The only alternative that really counts is the one judged best among those considered. At this point in the decision-making process, however, it is important to consider all feasible ways by which the problem can be solved.

The next stage is to generate possible alternative solutions that will respond to the needs of the situation and correct the underlying causes. One study found that limiting the search for alternatives is a primary cause of decision failure in organizations (Nutt P. 1999).

Evaluate alternatives

Usually, advantages and disadvantages can be found in every possible solution. One alternative may be clearly superior, but it may also have some weak points. Sometimes an idea sounds good initially, but taking time to weigh the pro and cons of alternatives usually pays off. There are a number of ways of evaluating alternatives. One way is to list the pros and cons of each.

Another way is to determine the expected payoff associated with each alternative.

Choose and implement the best alternative

The decision choice is the selection of the most promising of several alternative course of action. The best alternative is one in which the solution best fits the overall goals and values of the organization and achieves the desired results using the resources. The ultimate success of the chosen alternative depends on whether it can be translated into action. In the evaluation stage of the decision process, decision makers gather information that tells them how well the decision was implemented and whether it was effective in achieving its goals.

Evaluate the decision

No decision-making process is complete until the decision has been exposed to the realities of the business environment. The problem requires an objective assessment of how the decision has solved the problem or taken advantage of the problem-turned into opportunity. The implementation of a decision does not complete the decision making process.

3. DECISION MODELS

3.1 Classical model

The classical model of decision making is based on economic assumptions. This model has arisen within the management literature because managers are expected to make decisions that are economically sensible and fit the organizations' best economic interests. This model considered to be normative, which means it defines how a decision maker should make decisions (Daft R., 2005).

3.2 Administrative model

The administrative model of decision making is based on the work of Herbert Simon. Simon proposed two concepts that were instrumental in shaping the administrative model: bounded rationality and satisfying. According to the administrative model, decision goals often are vague conflicting and lack consensus among managers. This model recognizes the human and environmental limitations that affect the degree to which managers can pursue a rational decision-making process (David, 1996)

3.3 Political model

The political model closely resembles the real environment in which most managers and decision makers operate. Decisions are complex and involve many people, information is often ambiguous, and disagreement and conflict over problems and solutions are normal. Managers engage in the push and pull of debate to decide goals and discuss alternatives. Decisions are the result of bargaining and discussion among coalition members. (Daft R. 2005)

4. DECISION MAKING IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

4.1 Features of decision making in public organizations

Managers in public organizations face constraints that arise from limitations imposed by their external environment, from transitional expectations, and from required features of their organizational

processes that influence how they must make strategic decisions. The market in a public sector organization is given by the views of oversight bodies that disperse tax revenues. Public sector decision makers seek out and reconcile these views to make strategic decisions. Collaboration with oversight bodies often produces suggestions that become favored alternatives. Public sector managers are expected to use these ideas, which can distort and limit their search. In addition, decision makers in public organizations often lack information to fend off ideas they believe to be inappropriate. The power of people in oversight bodies, coupled with this lack of information, limit what alternatives can be considered. The limited autonomy of public sector decision makers and the political impact, especially in Albania, that can be marshaled by users and stakeholders make it difficult to evaluate ideas thrust on them.

Public sector decisions have many stakeholders who believe they have a right to participate in the process of making a decision. The decision-making approach must be able to cope with ubiquitous stakeholders, which gives a broad range of people a voice in what will be done (Freeman 1984). Goals and authority limits also impact, the way strategic decisions are made in public sector organizations. Goals are often vague in public organizations and stress notions of equity. The pressures for involvement and the need for negotiation push public organizations toward a consultative or networking-like decision culture, in which bargaining and negotiation are stressed.

5. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the article is to identify the skills that public administrators demonstrate during decision making in order to define how good is their decision making process.

To analyze and conclude on the skills and difficulties of public managers and to make decisions effectively, a questionnaire has been adopted, which had been previously translated into Albanian in order to be understandable to all and avoid any wrong answers due to language barriers. A total of 37 questionnaires were handed out to public administrators. The questionnaire contains 18 questions combined in groups of 2-4 questions which constitute 6 key skills that will be the axis of analysis. The combination of these six skills will lead us to three final results.

According to the questionnaire applied in the web site, individual responses were taken for each of the areas aforementioned. The questionnaire was based on Likert scale (1-5). Individual data for 6 skill set was transferred into Excel, where the results were calculated in % for the whole group of respondents.

([Http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_79.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_79.htm))

The interpretation of points will be as follows:

- **From 18 to 42 points:** Decision making of these administrators is not fully mature. They rely too much on luck, instinct or the time to make reliable decisions. They should improve decision-making skills by focusing more on the process that drives towards a decision, rather than focus on the decision itself.
- **From 43 to 66 points:** The process of decision-making is generally okay. These administrators have a good understanding of basic elements, but now they need to improve the decision-making process and be proactive as well. The better they analyze, the better their decision in long terms will be. They need to focus more on those issues where they result in fewer points and develop a system that will work for them in a variety of situations. (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_79.htm)
- **From 67 to 90 points:** These administrators have an excellent approach in decision making. They know how to build this process and generate more potential solutions. They use the experience gained and information to evaluate their decisions and therefore continue to be successful in their decision-making.

6. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

1. *Creating a positive decision making environment*

It is very important that everyone understands the issue well before preparing to take a decision. This includes agreeing on the same target, being sure that the proper "issue" is being discussed, as well as how to deal with the "process" that will keep the "decision" ahead.

They also need to address interpersonal and key considerations since the very beginning. Are all interest groups involved? And do all the persons involved agree with the decision, respect each other as well as comply together in an open and honest discussion? From questionnaire analysis (Figure 1) of the population being considered, it is shown that 35% of respondents are on an average level (3 *) of "creating a decisive positive environment", 54% are over average (4 *) and only 11% resulted to be at the maximum level (5 *).

Referring to questions (statements) of the questionnaire related to this important step of an effective decision making, it turns out that people who are over average appear to create a constructive environment by ensuring beforehand that they:

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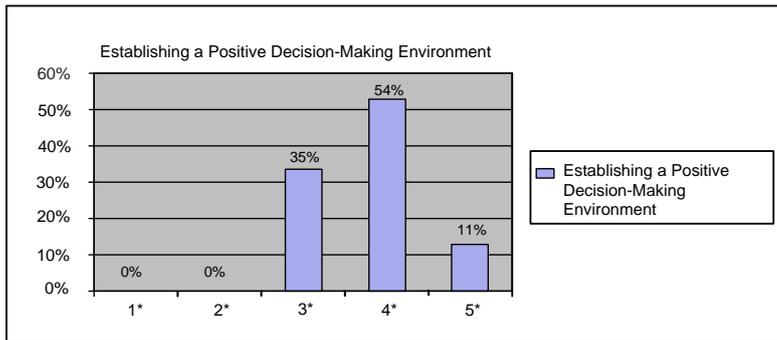


FIGURE 1 – CREATING A POSITIVE DECISION MAKING ENVIRONMENT

- Define target - Determine what you will accomplish
- Agree to the process know how the final decision will be taken, including whether the decision would be taken individually or in team.
- Include the interest groups
- Consider and evaluate different opinions.
- Use creative tools from the start with the aim of generating new ideas

2. Generating potential solutions

Another important part of a good decision making process is to generate as many good alternatives. If the first option is just adapted on the spot, then perhaps many other excellent alternatives are being lost.

In addition, by analyzing the questionnaires it results that only 5% of the questioned managers are below average (2 *), 70% are on average (3 *) and 25% of them are above average (4 *). (Figure 2)

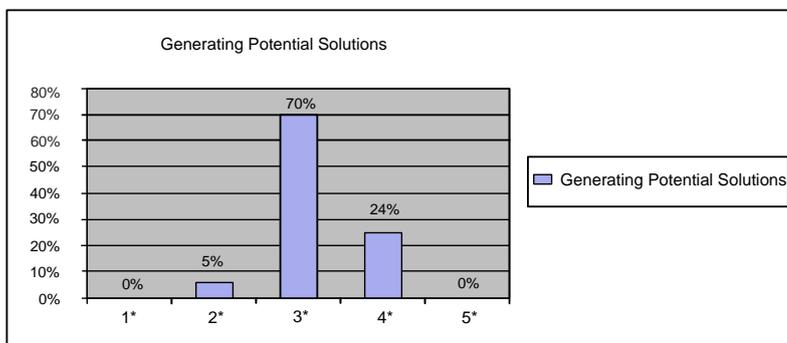


FIGURE 2 – GENERATING POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

The more options are considered, the more understanding the reached decision will be. Generating possible solutions means having first identified the problem by considering the history of the organization, based on future scenarios and considering others' perceptions.

3. The assessment of alternatives

In order for this step to be efficient, we need to be clear about the factors you want to include in the analysis. Three key factors are to be considered:

- Risk - Most decisions involve risk and decision makers should have full information about this risk.
- Consequences - Administrators should analyze the consequences of this decision in terms of the results that will come from its implementation.
- Viability– Is the choice realistic and implementable

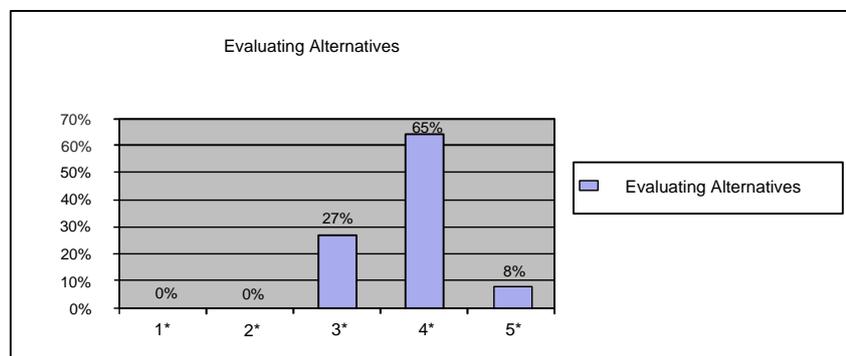


FIGURE 3 – ASSESSING THE ALTERNATIVES

By analyzing the results of the questionnaire it is noted that 27% of respondents are reported to be on average (3 *) about the “assessment of alternatives”; 65% are above average (4 *) and only 5% of them result at the maximum assessing level (5 *) (Figure 3).

4. Making the decision

Decision makers generally want to choose a better valued alternative. Decision theorists refer to the latter as the maximization of the expected usefulness of outcome. Different researches demonstrate that people have different preferences whether undertaking risk or not when making a decision.

By considering the above mentioned, based on the survey results (Figure 4), it is shown that 43% of the interviewees follow this step on average levels (3 *), and the other 49% are above average (4 *) and only 8% at the maximum level.

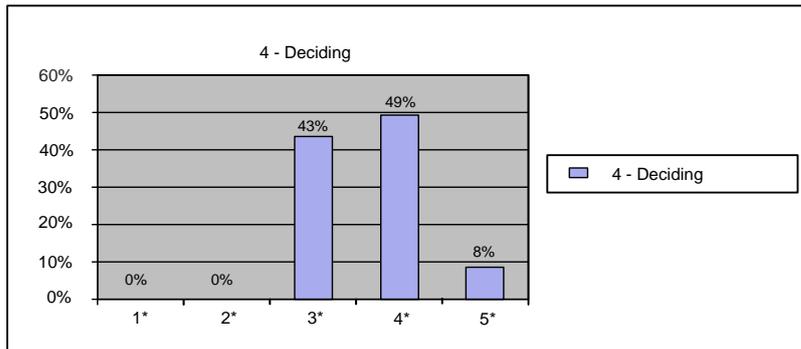


FIGURE 4 – DECISION MAKING

5. Decision control (claim 2.9)

Remember that some issues are not objective about the decision. The decision should have an intuitive sense, also based on some instinctive degree. At this stage it is time to check the option selected for its validity and meaning. From the questionnaire results we can see that 11% of respondents appreciate this step below average level (below 3 *) Graph 5.

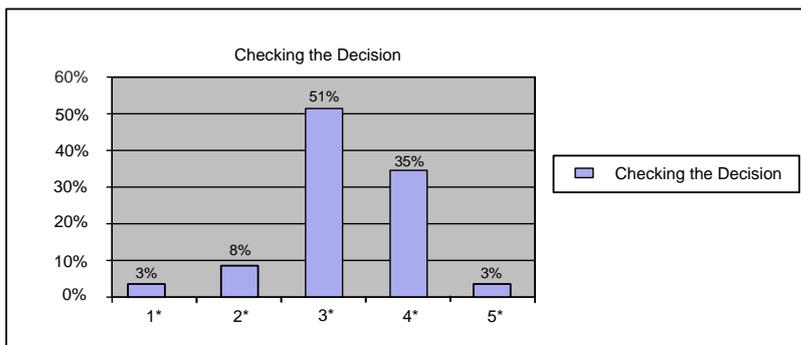


FIGURE 5 – CONTROLLING THE DECISION

Whiles 51% of them are in the medium level (3 *) and 40% at the maximum level.

Despite their efforts and great work to evaluate alternatives and choose between them, the "control" of decisions taken it is often forgotten. This is the moment when these administrators, once having taken a decision, review it objectively (without any passion) to ensure that the process was complete and that those common mistakes "were not dragged" into the decision-making process.

6. Communication and implementation

The last step in the process of decision-making involves communication and preparation for implementing the decision of administrators. For most decisions - in particular for those that need

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participation before being implemented – it is more effective to gain the support of others by explaining the decision.

From the test results it is noted that 30% of respondents follow this step on average level (3 *); 68% of them above average (4 *) and only 3% at maximum level apply and implement the decision taken (Figure 6).

This means that once a decision is made, it is important to explain it to those people who are affected by it and are also involved in the implementation of this decision. It is required to talk to them about the reasons that motivated you to make the decision.

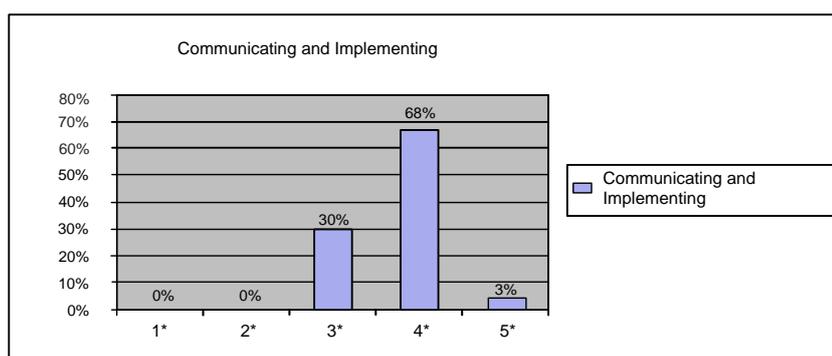


FIGURE 6 – COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

7. Making decisions as a complete process

Seeing the results of questionnaires, it appears as follows: 59% of the total population considered, falls into the category of 43 to 66 points, which means: The process of decision-making for 59% is OK. These public administrators have a good understanding of basic elements, but they need to improve the process and be more proactive. They should focus on decision making in long terms. They should also focus on those issues where they have resulted in fewer points and develop a system that will work for them in various situations.

Whiles 41% falls into the category of 67-90 points which means that they have an excellent approach in decision-making. These managers know how to build the process and generate more potential solutions.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this article, different skills of public administrators have been analyzed when they come to a decision by focusing on the effectiveness of the decision-making process. By empirical research, it was showed

that 59% of respondents are on the average level of quality and it is thus necessary to improve their decision making skills.

Findings show that only 11% of respondents are able to demonstrate their required skills to create a positive decision-making environment, to encourage all the main stakeholders to be involved actively in the process. Whiles 89% of them have had obstacles in creating a positive and incentive decision making environment.

75% of respondents have presented problems in generating potential solutions, thus making the process suffer from not identifying all possible alternatives. According to the results, only 8% of interviewees are able to take the best decision possible, while other administrators address problems. From all skill set, control results to be the strongest feature, so 91% are above average level of control, while 40% are at maximum level. Naturally, it is also based on the fact that there are vertical structures in these organizations and control is hierarchical. As regarding communication of the decision and its implementation, it is noted that only 3% of respondents have the maximum level of these skills, others are below this level, highlighting problems in terms of communication that will be reflected in inhibiting the successful implementation of decisions of public administrators.

As it was mentioned above, we recommend that public administrators should focus more on creating a positive and inclusive decision-making environment; they should also encourage individuals to express their ideas openly in order to receive a large number of available alternatives. Public administrators should focus entirely on analyzing every single alternative, and guarantee the selection of alternatives that meet best the organization's objectives. Based on research findings, we suggest that public administrators need to improve their communicative skills as an important element about taking decisions to other members of the organization, in order to increase their acceptability of the decision and be very clear about what is expected from them and how they should implement the decision.

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