

Preface

This book provides an examination of the combined areas of adaptive decision making and intellectual styles by illustrating the broad range and scope of decision making and intellectual preferences. In this preface, we review fundamental definitions and notions of the key concepts of adaptation, decision making and intellectual style, and explain why a consideration of their amalgamation is useful for effective functioning in the ever changing and developing globalized world.

Adaptation

Adaptation is simultaneously conservative and open-minded. It relies on responsiveness to feedback. Part of this responsiveness comes from a capacity to identify information from multiple sources relevant to the present or the future. It is the capacity to adjust from the traditional, conformist, and habitual thoughts and behaviors in response to both internal and external environments. The adaptive process is where one's attention, goals, and actions are continuously tailored to the experience in focus. It is a multilevel process that allows adjustment at both cognitive and behavioral levels. Adaptive capacity is a large framework for living, working, and problem solving. Arguably, people and organizations within the modern era need to develop adaptive capacity to deal with new dynamic circumstances such as globalization and digitalization, where there is an amplification of global social relations. By doing so, they can learn to thrive in less static and less predictable environments than previously existed. Because globalization has brought dramatic increases in interdependence and connectivity among social, economic, and political phenomena, there are new and unexpected tensions created which emanate from the paradoxical effects of the stark juxtaposition of the local and the global. It is no longer easy to distinguish between the close and the far, the real and the virtual as technology brings any part of the world to individuals wherever there is Internet connection. A challenge for individuals and organizations is therefore to learn to better meet adaptive challenges and adaptive changes more broadly. This requires both adaptive mindsets for individuals and adaptive cultures for organizations.

Adaptive challenges consist of a web of interdependent dynamic factors. From a sociological viewpoint, a key factor is that individuals and organizations are part of other systems—both smaller and larger—and thus share some of their characteristics. Both individuals and organizations are predisposed to adapt more or less to new realities. Adaptive capacity can be improved because it is a learned attribute based on a systems mindset which relies on a mix of innate abilities, experiences, and other characteristics such as intellectual style. Appreciating that individuals and organizations operate simultaneously in multiple systems is an imperative to developing and refining a systems mindset and the adaptive capacity to deal with adaptive challenges and adaptive decision making.

Decision Making

Decision making is about choosing. Choosing leads to constructing reality that is in continual reconstruction. The mind is perhaps the most complex object known and there are billions of people making trillions of decisions everyday. Many of our choices or decisions are routine and based on habitual behavior; some are quick, automatic decisions after not much consideration, and others—perhaps most important decisions—are made after a lot of consideration of various factors and risks related to the choice. There is a thin line between a good decision and a bad decision and it is not possible to know how good or bad the decision until the result of the choice reveals itself. A hallmark of the human mind is that it can reflect on itself and think about how it thinks and how it makes decisions. This is the metacognitive aspect of decision making: people thinking about how they make particular decisions, how they feel, and how they might improve their thinking.

Full knowledge is not merely facts but an appreciation of positions and counter positions. The conclusion is that full knowledge of uncertainty consists of judgment. A decision is a judgment that rests on an appreciation of the contingencies. This means that judgments or choices raise further questions and reveal further possibilities. Another paradox is that a selection from among the set of possibilities leads to a choice and this choice or solution itself will reveal further options.

Choice leads to a construction of reality that is in continual reconstruction. A decision results from judgment and judgments are themselves solutions. Decisions are always potentially many but there is one ultimate judgment, one existent solution. This is the decision to engage in activity whether the activity is habitual or learning. The task of identifying the solution is not the same for all. Deciding, making choices, making judgments, or finding solutions are learning processes that include unique thoughts, behaviors, and processes for different individuals, groups, and organizations. Individuals have a major role in facilitating genuine and participative decisions within organizations.

Intellectual Style

Intelligence is different from intellectual style. The former is a measure of how smart and quick we are while the second is more about our preferred ways of being smart, our comfortable ways of thinking, and our habits of mind. Intelligence and intellectual style each accounts for about 50 % of our success. So, intellectual style is as important as intelligence as far as our success is concerned. Zhang and Sternberg, two prominent world authorities on thinking, conceptualize style of thinking as an intellectual style embraced by all ‘style constructs’ evident in the literature such as cognitive style, conceptual tempo, decision-making and problem-solving styles, learning style, mind style, and perceptual style. As such all styles refer to one’s preferred ways of processing information and dealing with tasks. The ways we make decisions are preferred ways of thinking about solving problems and behaving.

Structure of the Book

In this book, we promote adaptive and iterative intellectual and decision-making styles because they best suit our modern environments. This is because our knowledge and relevance of information available to us, though comprehensive are imperfect. We value difference simply because different people in the same situation with similar information and experience will make different judgments because they notice different options, place different importance, and value different aspects. A good decision does not always yield the best solution and the notion of what is good or best is always in contention.

The book is structured around four key chapters where each chapter deals with a different aspect of decision making and intellectual styles from a social science perspective. The first chapter explores four social science disciplines and their perspectives and concerns in relation to decision making. The chapter is organized into four main sections: the sociology of decision making; decision making in management; cognition and decision making in marketing; and decision making from an education perspective. The second chapter clarifies some connections between adaptive decision making and the role of both critical thinking and intellectual style. There are three sections which commence with an introduction to decision making, including an exploration of the role of critical thinking and its accompanying skills (including the ability to challenge assumptions, adopt multiple perspectives, and ask questions). Next, the chapter provides an overview of the various theoretical perspectives encompassing the field of intellectual style, paying particular attention to how individuals prefer to think and feel in a range of situations. Finally, the second chapter provides some synthesis to the three constructs of decision making, critical thinking, and intellectual style as a foundation for introducing the cross-cultural comparative case studies that follow in [Chap. 3](#).

Chapter 3 explores intellectual styles of individuals living in different parts of the world. In the first part, the focus is on university students who represent the next generation of professionals. The chapter reports on explorative surveys conducted in three European regions: Northern Italy, Southern Italy, and Western Finland. To explore these notions, we introduced an innovative research methodology where a sample of university students was surveyed while subjected to an intensive project-based learning (PBL) experience. The final chapter highlights and extends several aspects already discussed in the first three chapters. We examine the role of decision biases and decision frameworks. Then we survey the relevance of some recent literature on intuition and its role in decision making. Also, we revisit decision making and the importance of intellectual style within the new world and coin the term Adaptive Decision Making 3.0 (ADM 3.0) to mean new and interactive approaches to decision making that incorporate awareness raising of intellectual style usage including deep professional learning at different levels (for example resilience, double- and triple-loop learning) to heighten our recognition and more effective utilization of decision biases and decision frameworks as well as intuition. The chapter concludes with two case studies on ADM 3.0, one on UNESCO and the other on QF12.

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