Group decision-making: Factors that affect group effectiveness

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Abstract

Organizations are operating in a dynamic and turbulent environment. In these conditions, they have to make decisions for new problems or situations. Most of decisions are therefore non-programmed and unstructured, accompanied by risk and uncertainty. Moreover, the problems and situations are complex. All organizations are oriented towards group decision-making processes, as useful tools to cope with uncertainty and complexity. Apart from the necessity, companies are turning towards participatory processes also to benefit from the important advantages that these processes offer. Organizations have realized the importance of group decision-making processes to contribute to the creation of sustainable competitive advantages.

Main objective of this paper is to show that group decision-making processes do not offer guarantee for good decisions, because the effectiveness of group is affected by many factors. So, the first thing done in this paper is discussing about the benefits and limitations that accompany the use of groups with decision-making purpose. Afterwards, we stop on the different factors that influence the group's ability to make good decisions. The aim is to emphasize that regardless of the many advantages of groups, some factors as group size, type of communication within the group, leadership style, the norms, the differentiation of roles and statuses, cohesion and compliance degree should be the main elements to keep into consideration because they affect the effectiveness of group. In this regard, is discussed how such factors influence the quality of decision and then we try to draw some conclusions that can improve and make better and easier group decision-making processes.

Keywords: group size, communication, leadership style, norms, roles and statuses, cohesion and compliance.

Introduction

When the individual decision-making process is compared with the group decision-making process the advantages of the latter are numerous (Luthans, 1992). The advantages of group decision making highlighted in the literature are different. Some authors argue that the decisions taken by the group are better than those taken by the individual (Sniezek & Henry, 1989; Tindale & Sheffey, 2002; Surowiecki, 2004). Llaci (2010) points out that the group is able to put together much more information than a single person, while Noorderhaven (1995) believes that the decision-making at group level is considered more legitimate than the decision made by one person. Kume (2010) focuses on the benefits of group decision-making process regarding the implementation phase. She claims that since in a group often participate members who will also be involved during implementation, the decision is better understood and this improves the effectiveness. In fact, the implementation phase is very important, but often we can fail at this stage of the decision-making process, because

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the decision is not clear and understood, or because the decision is not accepted. On the other hand, a participatory decision-making process increases the personal motivation (Lawrence & Seiler, 1984; Miller & Monge, 1986). Empirical studies have shown that the group increases satisfaction (Black & Gregersen, 1997; Wright & Kim, 2004) and self-confidence (Parnell & Crandall, 1994).

We may think that group decisions are qualitatively better than those of individuals, but it must be emphasized that also groups can make bad decisions. Here we can mention groupthinking (Janis, 1982), polarization (Stoner, 1961; Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977), time limits (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Nooderhaven, 1995; Kume, 2002) and the effect of common information (Stasser & Titus, 1985; Gigone & Hastie, 1993).

However, we must admit that the benefits of group decision-making process are numerous compared to the problems. It is necessary that the benefits of group decision-making process do not become absolute conclusions (Noorderhaven, 1995). Everything depends on the criteria according to which the comparison is made (Brown, 1988, p.127). So, if it is used as a criterion of time, then it is preferable an individual decision making. But if we seek effectiveness instead of efficiency, then groups do better. Hence, it becomes important to define what is meant by group effectiveness.

The adoption of group decision-making process is not a guarantee for success, because the effectiveness of the group is influenced by many factors. This is undoubtedly a very complex subject, but in the following we are trying to discuss different factors that can affect the quality of group decisions and then to draw conclusions that can improve and make better and easier these processes.

The aim of the study and research question

The benefits of group decision-making are numerous compared with individual processes. The aim of this paper is to show that group decision-making processes can also lead to bad decisions, because the effectiveness of group is affected by many factors. So, in relation to the aim, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1.   Which are the advantages that accompany the group decision-making?
2.   Are the benefits sufficient to affirm that groups lead to better decisions compared with individuals?
3.   Which are the factors that affect the effectiveness of the group and how do they influence the quality of decisions?

Methodology

For this paper is adopted the literature on based research methodology. So, the study starts bringing a general theoretical framework of the group decision-making process, with its benefits and limits. It continues trying to provide a theoretical overview in order to understand which are the factors that become important talking about quality of decisions and how they can affect group effectiveness.

This methodology assumes importance because analyzing and discussing the theoretical basis of group decision-making effectiveness, we can:
- find new ideas for future researches;
- define different objects of investigation;

- elaborate appropriate research designs with the respective objectives and hypotheses to be tested.

Group effectiveness conditions

Talking about the conditions that affect group effectiveness Mohrman, Cohen and Mohrman (1995) report the distinction between external or context factors and internal factors. External factors are out of the control of the group; however the internal factors are under the direct control of the group. Very interesting is the perspective of Cohen and Bailey (1997). Effectiveness can be categorized in three dimensions referring to the impact of the group on the effectiveness of performance, in terms of quantity and quality of outputs, on the attitude of the members and on the behavioral outcomes. Examples of measuring the effectiveness of the performance are efficiency, productivity, time, quality, innovation. Examples of measuring attitudes are satisfaction, commitment and the trust to managers. Examples of measuring the behaviors are absenteeism, turnover and safety (Cohen and Bailey, 1997, 243).

The authors believe that the effectiveness is a function of environmental factors, design factors, group processes and its psychosocial characteristics. Environmental factors relate to the characteristics of the industry in which the company operates, such as the level of turbulence. The design factors relate to the characteristics of the task, group and organization. Among the variables of the task we can mention autonomy and interdependence, while among the variables of the group we have the size, demographics and diversity. Instead organizational variables relate to rewards and supervision. The group processes relate primarily to the communication, collaboration and conflict, while the psychosocial variables of the group relate to the rules, cohesion, mental models and affection. Yukl (2010) among the above factors considers important the ability of members and clarity of roles.[1]

We must take into consideration also the difficulties and challenges that may affect the effectiveness of the group. Among them we can highlight the time or the degree of external pressure for immediate results (Nooderhaven, 1995; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). As a consequence, often group members identify few alternatives and do not undertake deep analysis for understanding the results. On the other hand, the effectiveness can also be influenced by the composition and the group structure, both formally and informally. In the case of formal groups there may be negative consequences on creativity and innovation, while informal groups can deviate from the pre-established objectives. Furthermore, we must not forget how important is the level of personal information and the degree of sharing of such information. Mostly, the pressure of the group for compliance leads to ineffective decisions. Also, we should not forget the group's maturity level, as more experience is accumulated, less is the possibility for mistakes.

Referring to Kume (2010), to induce the group to effective decisions two conditions are needed. The first concerns the participation. Being member of a group can lead to satisfaction and the individual feels happy to have contributed to the problem solving.

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[1] The importance of roles differentiation is discussed further on.

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For this to happen we have to put together people who have more or less the same capabilities. The second condition relates to the possibility of the group continuation. At this regard, we must pay attention to the way the members are chosen, trying to put together people who are able to work in teams, because we have to admit that not all have this ability.

At this point, the question that arises consists on what to do to make effective a group. Yukl (2010) gives some guidance in this regard, referring in particular to the role of the leader. First, it must put the emphasis on common interests and values. The identification with the group is enhanced when members share the goals, values, priorities and strategies. In order to promote efficiency is required a style of participatory leadership, instead of a central one. It is also important that the leader of the group encourages and facilitates interaction and communication between members and apply incentive methods based on individual performance. In addition, members may feel despised when they receive reduced information about the activities and achieved results. So, we have to inform members and show them how their efforts contributed to the achievement of objectives. Kreitner and Kinicki (2007) talking about effectiveness of the groups assign an important role to the clarity of the mission, objectives and task. It is necessary that all members of the group know the problem or the situation, because many times are taken poor decisions because of the failure in the problem identification phase. This phase affects undoubtedly the effectiveness of all the other phases of the decision-making process. However, there are certain characteristics of groups that can help evaluate whether a group is effective or not. The table that follows summarizes these characteristics.

Table 1: Characteristics of effective and ineffective groups

Effective groups	Ineffective groups
Dominates an informal atmosphere	Dominates an atmosphere characterized by tension
Discussions with wide partecipation	Discussions dominated by one or two individuals
Clear objectives and tasks	Unclear objectives and tasks
Members listen to each others	Members do not listen to each other
Conflicts are not avoided, but the group tries to resolve them in a constructive way	The conflict is ignored or avoided
Decisions are made by consensus	Decisions are made by the majority and the minority have to accept them
The ideas are expressed freely and openly	The ideas and feelings are taken hidden because of the fear of being criticized
The leader does not impose himself	The leader dominates the group
The group analyzes its progress and behavior	The group avoids evaluating its progress and behavior

So, we can state that the decisions taken by the group may have different outcomes. This is because the effectiveness of group decision-making process depends on many factors such as the size of the group, the communication process, the leadership style, the norms, the roles and statuses differentiation, cohesion and compliance degree.

Group size

The size is perhaps the most important element of the group structure, because it directly affects the ability of the group to reach the consensus. It is easier to arrive at consensus for small groups of 5-7 members, while it is difficult to arrive at consensus for large groups of more than 12 members (Kume, 2010, p.88).

Large groups in practice often operate as an aggregate of two or more subgroups. In some cases, the size of the functional group which is represented by the number of members participating actively is less than the nominal group size (Baron et al., 1992). The size of the group depends on various factors, such as the nature of the situation for which we have to decide (Noorderhaven, 1995). The more the group is large, more the competitiveness between members is stimulated. If we refer to the experiments of Triplett (1898), the competitive situations increase individual commitment. But on the other hand, Allport (1924) highlights that the presence of others stimulates the individual to try harder and leads to better results only for simple tasks. For difficult tasks is true the opposite. In addition, in large groups some members may move to a passive position, a phenomenon known as "social loafing" (Liden, Wayne, Jaworski & Bennett, 2004). Individuals often try less harder when they have to reach a goal by operating in a larger group than when working alone (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979). This means that in large groups some members become unproductive. So, in large groups motivation can diminish, although this depends on how the situation is perceived. If the decision is seen as particularly important, most members of the group are involved. On the other hand, the more the group is large, the lower is the cohesion. Within these groups may occur coordination problems (Steiner, 1972) and productivity block (Diehl and Stroebe, 1987, 1991). Noorderhaven (1995) points out that small groups are more vulnerable because the individual incompatibility can paralyze decision making, while large groups of over 10 members are likely to develop a more formal interaction style, so individual differences can be covered more easily.

In large groups, we can find subgroups that tend to deviate from the common goals of the group and pursue their interests. Scott (1987) distinguishes three types of subgroups within a group. The first is the subgroup of primary position that represents the group epicenter, because it defines the rules and guides the group toward the set target. The second is the subgroup with special status, formed by important members of the group that are supportive to the first subgroup, but they have also the privilege to act independently of the primary position. The third is the subgroup without status, composed of members who have no influence on group decisions and are often chosen to meet the predetermined size of the group. The more subgroups are formed; the greater is the risk of poor decisions. Apart from that, even if we cannot determine the optimal size of the group, we should avoid large groups because they damage the real interdependence and meaningful interactions between the members (Straus, Parker, Bruce & Dembosky, 2009). However, small groups fall more often in the use of various biases and are more affected by the positivity towards the own group (Hewstone, Rubin & Willis, 2002).

Kreitner and Kinicki (2007) make the distinction between two approaches: the

mathematician and that of laboratory simulations. The mathematical models seek to evaluate the optimal size of the group as a function of the desired results, such as the quality of decisions. According to these models is not possible to determine the right size, which can range from 3-13 members. There are no concordances on the group size even for laboratory simulations. So, Yetton and Bottger (1982) believe that the most effective groups are those of 4-5 members, while Laughlin, Hatch, Silver and Boh (2006) concluded that for decisions that require greater intellect the best groups are those of 3 members.

It is not always easy to establish the size of the group, because of the different criteria on which is defined the group membership. The choice of group members can often occur with refers to the organizational structure or job description. In other cases it may be important the perception of individual itself. We can distinguish four types of group membership, as shown in Figure 1. The psychological membership refers to a situation in which a group member is attracted by the group and at the same time is also accepted by the other members. In the case of preferential membership the individual feels attracted by the group, but found it difficult to be accepted by others. In the marginal membership, the situation is totally contrary. The individual is accepted by the other members of the group, but his attraction for the group is low. Instead, in the alienative membership where both the attraction for the group and the acceptance by the other members are low, the individual may be considered out of the group.

So, as discussed above, to determine the size of the group, but also to choose the members we must answer a few questions: What is the individual's propensity toward group decisions, or is he an individualist? Someone else perceives him as a member? Moreover, the other members of the group agree on its participation and accept him as a member? This model demonstrates that the acceptance by the group and the attraction for the group are two important criteria to be taken into consideration.

Figure 1: Types of group membership

	Acceptance	
	High	Low
High	Psychological membership	Preferential membership
Attraction Low	Marginal membership	Alienative membership

(Source: Noorderhaven, 1995, p.98)

Groups are faced with problems and situations of different levels of complexity. Consequently, the different phases of the decision-making process require a different commitment. The decision-making process can be difficult in large groups, but can

be successfully accomplished in groups of maximum 12 people. In the table below is evaluated the effectiveness of the group according to the size.

Table 2: Group effectiveness and size

Size	< than 4 members	4-6 members	7-12 members	13-20 members	> than 20 members
Problem solving	Very low	Low	Normal	Good	Very good
Judgment speed	Good	Very good	Normal	Low	Low
Members partecipation	Very good	Good	Normal	Low	Low
Coesion	Very good	Good	Normal	Low	Low
Consensus	Low	Low	Normal	Very good	Low
Flexibility	Very good	Good	Normal	Low	Low
Individual productivity	Very low	Low	Normal	Low	Very low
Group productivity	Very low	Low	Normal	Very good	Low

(Source: Kume, 2010, 89)

The group size affects the objectives achievement and its results, and relates to the objectives and decisions typology (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007). When the group size increases, the interaction between members decreases and relationships become less affective. In addition, large groups tend more toward political than analytical solutions. But we must also admit the advantages of such groups. The more the group is large, the greater are the energy and technical resources. The information collected is larger and can be identified more possible alternatives. In addition, a large group offers more critical judgments and the decisions made are more acceptable.

The communication

The communication is an essential element for group decision-making. Without communication it would not be possible the interaction among members. Also, the communication conditions the cohesion and the effectiveness of the group. Bales (1953) highlights that within a group the member who communicates and receives more messages, controls the group communication. Communication is the process of exchanging information between two or more people. Within a group there are communication networks that represent the patterns of transmission and exchange of information, which define who communicate more frequently, to what extent and with whom (Forsyth, 2010, 168).
Bavelas (1950) and Leavitt (1951) distinguish two categories of communication networks in groups composed of five members: centralized networks and

decentralized networks. The question that arises is which of these communication networks is better. The groups with centralized networks outweigh the groups with decentralized networks (Bavelas, 1950; Leavitt, 1951). Also, the conclusions of Shaw (1964) are interesting. The groups with centralized networks require less time to make a decision and solve problems. On the other hand, the centralized networks are best for simple tasks. For complex decisions are preferred decentralized networks. Thus, studying the performance of group Cummings and Cross (2003) found that the groups that used decentralized networks for a complex decision did better than groups that used centralized networks. With regard to the satisfaction and motivation Bavelas (1950) and Leavitt (1951) believe that there is an inverse relationship with the degree of centrality.

To summarize we can say that it is preferable the use of centralized networks for simple and routine decisions, because the information is transmitted faster. These networks reinforce the position of the central member, while the other members of the group are less satisfied. However, for complex and non-routine decisions it is preferable the use of decentralized networks because in the case of unstructured decisions the creativity and innovation become too important. These networks offer to group members the opportunity to express new ideas and being more happy and satisfied.

The leadership

The leadership is another important variable of group dynamics. This variable becomes important especially for large groups because of coordination problems (Noorderhaven, 1995). It involves a process in which the intentional influence is extended on others to guide, structure, facilitate the activities and relationships within a group or organization (Yukl, 2010, p.21).

The leadership models differ according to some main approaches (Yukl, 2010). Thus, according to the approach of the traits we can identify some physical characteristics and of the personality that help define a good leader. In the period 1950-1960, the trait approach was replaced by the behavioral approach with the studies of Ohio and of the University of Michigan that distinguish different leadership styles based on the leader orientation toward the task and human relations. Instead, the development of contingency approach emphasizes that it is not possible to determine the best style of leadership, because among others it depends very much on the situation. In the early 80's takes development the transformational approach, according to which leaders through a variety of behaviors can transform the contributions of subordinates in order to achieve the common goals.

So, we must emphasize that it is not possible to identify which of the forms of leadership is the best. This is because there are different leadership approaches, and also the criteria and characteristics on which is defined the most appropriate leadership style are different. Consequently, a good leader should be able to adopt different styles of leadership according to different personal characteristics, of the situation and of subordinates. What we can say without doubt is that leadership assumes an important role and influences group effectiveness, by orienting individual

contributions towards the achievement of common objectives.

Norms

The norms define what is right and wrong and what is good and bad (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2009). They represent shared rules and behavioral patterns of how the members of a group should behave (Kasimati & Manxhari, 2002). So, Hare (1962) states that the norms are rules of conduct, appropriate ways to act, accepted as legitimate by the members of a group and specify the type of behavior that is expected from the members of the group.

The norms may be different (Forsyth, 2010). Thus, the prescriptive norms define a more socially appropriate way to respond in a social situation. The proscriptive norms define the actions and behaviors that are sanctioned and thus should be avoided. Instead, the descriptive norms describe how members act, feel and think in a specific situation. On the other hand, the injunctive norms are more evaluative. They describe the sorts of behaviors that people ought to perform. People who do not respect the descriptive norms are seen as unusual, but those who violate injunctive norms are evaluated negatively and are open to sanctions by the other members of the group (Forsyth, 2010, 145).

Norms can be developed in different ways (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2009). They can result from higher hierarchy levels or be the result of participation among members. They can also be linked to critical events in the group's history or past behaviors. Norms are not only rules of conduct that members of the group have to comply, but may also include other issues, such as how to conduct meetings, the language and the process of communication etc (Kume, 2010). Leaders are those who first have to respect the group norms, since they are an example to others. Bettenhausen and Murnighan (1985) studying the norms in groups that take the form of coalitions, underline that they derive from processes of negotiation among group members. Within a group the norms can perform certain functions (Cartwright and Zander, 1968). They help to achieve common objectives and allow the group to remain united over time, creating its own identity. In addition, the norms increase the cohesion and help to establish a relationship with the other groups. They can help members overcome complex situations and facilitate behavioral expectations (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2009).

Very interesting are the conclusions of Sherif (1936) with the experiment on the autokinetic effect. Individuals were asked individually and in group to indicate how centimeters moved a little light in a dark room, in fact motionless, but that due to an optical illusion seemed to be moving. When the individuals have to answer in group, their opinions starts to converge. It took three meetings to constitute a norm and the three members perceived a shift of 3 inches. Sherif continued with his experiments to highlight what happens over time. The results confirmed that norms are long lasting. The author has called this process "internalization of norms" (Sherif, 1966). So, norms are stable and once developed, resist changes and are transmitted to new members (Forsyth, 2010).

Often group members respect norms for not being considered different, and continue to be part of the group. In this context, we can refer to the experiment of Schachter

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(1951). He created a group of university students who have to discuss the story of Johnny Rocco, a young offender. A member of the group was accomplice of Schachter and had the task to express a different opinion from the majority. This member was the only one who thought it was fairer to punish Rocco. It was noted that the other members of the group have pledged so much to converge his opinion with that of the group, and when this was not possible they have tried to exclude him from the group. So, norms are undoubtedly important to coordinate the activities of the group and for the effectiveness of group decision-making process, but often can lead to conformism and limits of group decision-making like group thinking and polarization.

Roles and statuses

The differentiation of roles is an important dimension of the group structure (Noorderhaven, 1995). The roles are behaviors expected from a member who occupies a specific position within a group (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007). According to Benne and Sheats (1948) can be distinguished roles focused on the task, roles centered on individual relationships and personal roles. The roles focused on the task are important to achieve the common objectives, while the roles centered on relations are meant to improve the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships taking care of the feelings of others, reducing conflict and increasing the satisfaction and trust. The individual roles include behaviors centered on the personal needs of the member that are considered more important compared to the needs of the group. The roles focused on the task and the relationship may be functional roles and are important to the group's goals, while individual roles can be defined non-functional roles and often can damage the effectiveness of the group (Kasimati & Manxhari, 2002). Among the task oriented roles, Forsyth (1990) distinguishes the initiator, the researcher of the opinions and the recorder. Instead socio-emotional roles that relate to the emotional needs of members include the encourager, the mediator and the group observer. Bales (1950) believes that a member cannot take on roles at the same time focused on the task and roles centered on the relationships and that's why it becomes important the differentiation of roles.

Even the status is defined by the position that the member occupies within the group. Very interesting is the approach of expectation states of Berger, Rosenholtz and Zelditch (1980). According to this approach, the differentiation of status develops when members face a task perceived as very important. This leads to a process of evaluation of the status characteristics that represent personal qualities that members think are indicative of the ability or the prestige (Forsyth, 2010). So, according to the expectations of the contribution that each can give to achieve the group's goals are formed the statuses. Berger, Rosenholtz and Zelditch (1980) distinguish between specific and general characteristics of the status. The former includes characteristics that determine the competences and skills of performing a task, while the general characteristics refer to variables such as age, gender, ethnicity etc.

The question concerns on the usefulness of roles and statuses within a group. They facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the group because we know what to expect and by whom, and help a member to form a more complete view of himself.

Cohesion and compliance

Lewin (1943) describes cohesion as the group's ability to maintain united its members. Baron et al. (1992) state that cohesion can be defined as the set of positive relationships within the group (cit. in Noorderhaven, 1995, 99). According to Hogg (1992) cohesion arises when members identify themselves with a particular group. In these conditions they undergo the attitudes and behaviors to the norms which are characteristic for their group and that differ much from the norms of other groups (Friedkin, 2004). Cohesion can take different forms (Forsyth, 2010). Social cohesion refers to the relations of attraction. Cohesion centered on the task depends on the degree in which members are able to coordinate their contribution and commitment to the achievement of the common objectives. Perceived cohesion depends on group membership feelings, while emotional cohesion is determined by the intensity of the common emotions. Cohesion may depend on several factors (Kasimati & Manxhari, 2002). Among others, it could be the time spent together. When group members spend more time together, they tend to establish relations of friendship and undertake common activities, which help to discover similar interests. However, this depends on physical proximity. On the other hand, the greater the risks and threats coming from the outside; the higher is the level of group cohesion. Even past successes can help encouraging cohesion. Furthermore, if the members have faced many difficulties and obstacles to join the group, greater is the cohesion. Another factor that affects the degree of cohesion is the size of the group (Forsyth, 2010). In large groups increases the number of possible relationships between members. In these conditions, not all the relationships can be strong and positive. The group structure can affect the cohesion although in this case it is a mutual influence. The cohesive groups tend to be very structured, but it is often the type of the group structure that leads to cohesion (Forsyth, 2010).

According to Lewin (1951) cohesion affects directly the way decisions are made. If cohesion is high the decisions are taken unanimously, but if the cohesion is low the final decision is that of the majority. For the author the cohesion within a group depends on some factors such as the willingness of group members to be honest and sincere to express their ideas and feelings, the satisfaction they take from being member of a group, level of affection between members and group's ability to deal with complex problems and emergencies.

A high degree of cohesion can lead to compliance. Compliance can have its positive effects as well as negative. In groups where there is compliance increases the level of coordination and efficiency, but it can damage the creativity. Two essential factors that lead to compliance are the influence of norms and information (Noorderhaven, 1995). If the majority point of view is not accepted this can easily lead to conflict, especially in cohesive groups where the deviant runs the risk of losing the status and of hostility from others. About the influence of the information, if the majority expresses a certain opinion, this may be enough for the minority to put into question its judgment.

The forms of compliance may be different (Forsyth, 1990). Figure 2 below shows these forms. At the beginning a member may agree to the majority as a consequence of a conviction process. In this case we have the conversion. But it can happen that

the member agrees publicly and at the same time have reservations about the majority opinion. In this case we are talking of compliance. On the other hand, a member cannot accept the majority both in the private and public position, being so independent in the opinions. Regarding to the counter of compliance, the member often reflects the desire to be the center of attention or can be a tool in the differentiation of roles.

Figure 2: Four types of responses to compliance pressure

	Private position	
	Agree	Disagree
Agree	Conversion	Compliance
Disagree	Counter-conformity	Indipendence

Public position

(Source: Forsyth, 1990, cit. in Noorderhaven, 1995, p.114)

Baron et al. (1992) believe that the greater is the uncertainty about the most appropriate solution, higher is the compliance. The independence of opinions is undoubtedly linked to the personality of the individual, but we should keep in mind that compliance can also be a consequence of the statuses differentiation. As well as Forsyth (1990) points out, the members of the group with lower status are more oriented toward compliance. The author also stops on the fact that when a deviant is not the only one is easier for him to resist to the pressure of conformity. Tannenbaum (1966) states that the more the group is attractive for its members, the more they change their opinions to conform to those of the other members of the group. If an individual fails to comply, the group will seek to exclude him and more attractive is the group for its members, more decisive they will be. The member will be excluded if it becomes a deviant about an important issue for the group (p.58-59).

After the discussion above we can say that a cohesive group and characterized by conformity is a compact group where members accept and undertake actions and behaviors to achieve the objectives. In general, between the cohesion and productivity of the group there is a positive correlation. However, the cohesion is not sufficient for the success of the group. In addition, for good and strong relations between the members it is necessary that the objectives are known and accepted and the group has the appropriate size. On the other hand, the cohesion does not always lead to compliance. A group with high cohesion can also promote and encourage different ways of thinking and behavior.

Conclusions

Nowadays organizations have to operate in an environment characterized by dynamism and turbulence and as a consequence it is often necessary to decide for complex problems or situations, accompanied by uncertainty. The group decision-making processes can be valid tools to cope all this. The benefits of these processes are different, but still they do not offer a guarantee for success. The effectiveness of the decisions taken depends on many factors.

The effectiveness is a function of environmental factors, design factors, group processes and its psychosocial characteristics. Environmental factors relate to the characteristics of the industry in which the company operates, such as the level of turbulence. The design factors relate to the characteristics of the task, group and organization. Among the variables of the task we can mention autonomy and interdependence, while among the variables of the group we have the size, demographics and diversity. Instead organizational variables relate to rewards and supervision. The group processes relate primarily to the communication, collaboration and conflict, while the psychosocial variables of the group relate to the rules, cohesion, mental models and affection.

The size is perhaps the most important element of the group structure, because it directly affects the ability of the group to reach the consensus. When the group size increases, the interaction between members decreases and relationships become less affective. In addition, large groups tend more toward political than analytical solutions. But we must also admit the advantages of such groups. The more the group is large, the greater are the energy and technical resources. The information collected is larger and can be identified more possible alternatives. In addition, a large group offers more critical judgments and the decisions made are more acceptable.

Also the communication process conditions the effectiveness of the group. It is not simple to identify the most appropriate type of communication. At this regard, the characteristics of the decision may be a valid aid. It is preferable the use of centralized networks for simple and routine decisions, because the information is transmitted faster. These networks reinforce the position of the central member, while the other members of the group are less satisfied. However, for complex and non-routine decisions it is preferable the use of decentralized networks because in the case of unstructured decisions the creativity and innovation become too important. These networks offer to group members the opportunity to express new ideas and being more happy and satisfied.

On the other hand, also the leadership style adopted can lead to good or bad decisions. The leader of the group must put the emphasis on common interests and values. The identification with the group enhances when members share the goals, values, priorities and strategies. In order to promote efficiency is required a style of participatory leadership, instead of a central one. It is also important that the leader of the group encourages and facilitates interaction and communication between members and apply incentive methods based on individual performance. However, a good leader should be able to adopt different styles of leadership according to different personal characteristics, of the situation and of subordinates.

We must take into consideration also the influence of norms, roles and statuses on the effectiveness of the group. Norms are undoubtedly important to coordinate the activities of the group and for the effectiveness of group decision-making process, but often can lead to conformism and limits of group decision-making like group thinking and polarization. Roles and statuses facilitate the achievement of the objectives of the group because we know what is expected and by whom, and help a member to form a more complete view of himself. So, in groups where there is not a good differentiation of roles and statuses the effectiveness of the decision can be low. Also the cohesion and compliance affect directly the way decisions are made. A cohesive group and characterized by conformity is a compact group where members accept and undertake actions and behaviors to achieve the objectives. In general, between the cohesion and productivity of the group there is a positive correlation. However, the cohesion is not sufficient for the success of the group. Compliance can have its positive effects as well as negative. In groups where there is compliance the level of coordination and effectiveness increases, but it can damage the creativity. In a dynamic environment the creativity becomes important. However, the cohesion does not always lead to compliance. A group with high cohesion at the same time can promote and encourage different ways of thinking and behavior.

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