



Research Summary Number 7

Debunking Myths about Decision-Makers

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Abstract:

This study explores conventional wisdom about decision-makers and the practice of including others in the decision-making process. Two generally accepted beliefs are examined: are women more inclusive of others than are men when making decisions and have managers become more generally inclusive of others when making decisions.

Debunking Myths about Decision-Makers

Myth # 1: “Women are more participative decision-makers than are men.”

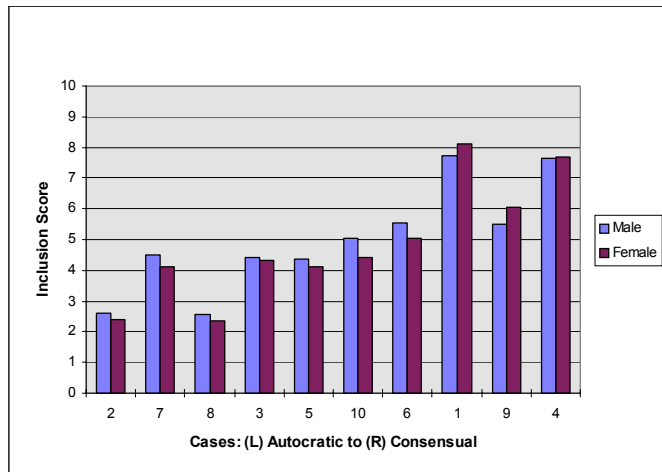
Results: For the ten cases, the expert score weighted for inclusion was 5.19. Male managers selected decision styles that yielded an aggregate score of 4.86, thus representing a slight bias overall toward autocratic decision-making. Women managers selected decision styles for the same cases that yielded an aggregate score of 4.99. Figure 1 shows case-by-case the comparison of inclusion scores for managers by gender and for the “experts.” In addition, for the two cases where the autocratic style was the expert style, women were slightly more likely to choose it than were men. Likewise, in the two cases where a consensual style was deemed by experts to be most appropriate, women were again slightly more likely to choose it than were men.

Managers disregard the Problem Clarity decision factor when they do not clearly understand the nature of the problem at hand and select a decision style that does not allow for clarifying input from others. An analysis of the Problem Clarity factor showed basically no difference between the number of men and women never ignoring this decision factor for the ten cases (32.5% of men versus 30% of women).

The Information decision factor is

disregarded by managers when they lack adequate and accurate information to make a good decision but select a decision style that does not allow others to provide that information. An analysis of the Information decision factor shows little difference between the percentage of men and women (57% of men versus 60% of women) who always considered this factor in the ten cases.

Figure 1. Inclusion Scores by Gender



The Commitment decision factor is disregarded when the manager selects a decision style that excludes a person or persons whose active participation is needed to implement the decision. An analysis of the Commitment decision factor over all the cases revealed that 37% of women compared to and 32% of men frequently disregarded (four or more out of six possible cases) this factor.

Goal Agreement is ignored as a decision factor when the manager selects a decision style that overly in-

volves others whose goals may not be aligned with the decision-maker's goals or those of the organization. An analysis of the Goal Agreement decision factor for these ten cases revealed that 55% of men compared to 49% of women always considered goal agreement in each case where it was a relevant factor.

The Time decision factor is disregarded when the manager selects a decision style that requires more time than is deemed appropriate. An analysis of this decision factor over all ten cases revealed that 19% of men compared to 15% of women ignored the Time factor frequently (i.e., five or more times out for eight possible cases).

Conclusions: Because the reported difference between men's and women's inclusion scores (4.86 vs. 4.99 respectively) is not statistically significant, women managers and male managers tend to choose decision styles similarly. Women are not, in fact, significantly more participative in their decision-making. In the cases where extreme autocratic and extreme consensual decision styles were appropriate, women were slightly more likely to choose those styles than were men.

Myth # 2:
“Managers have become more inclusive decision-makers over time.”

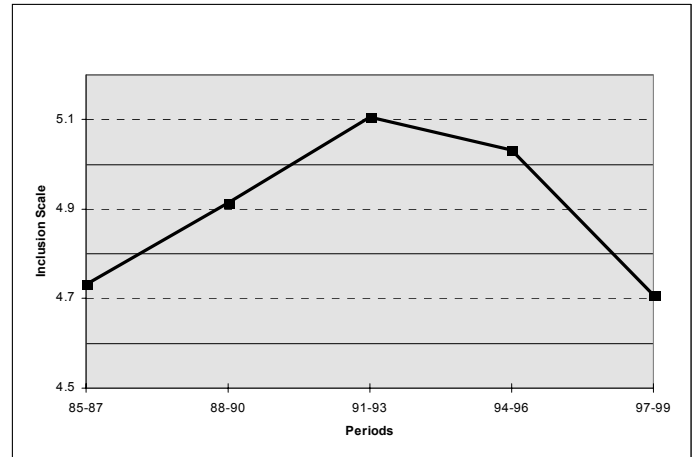
Results: For the 15 years in question, managers chose decision styles that were on average increasingly more inclusive from 1985 to 1993. From 1994 through 1999, the choices for decision styles favored decreasing degrees of inclusion. Figure 2 shows the aggregate trend. The trend was reflected in each of the ten cases. During the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, the average decision-inclusion score moved toward more inclusive decision-making by about 8%. During the middle-’90’s, the decision-inclusion preference score held relatively steady before

dropping in the late ’90’s to a score only slightly lower than where it began in the mid-’80’s.

Conclusions: Managers’ preferences for including others in the decision-making process change over time. Depending on the time intervals evaluated, one might think that participative decision-making has been increasing. However, evaluation of a broader time-period suggests that the change in preference for including others in decision-making

can decline as well as increase. From the data analyzed, managers in the late 1990s preferred to include others in their decision-making at about the same levels as they did in the middle 1980s.

Figure 2. Change in Preference for Inclusion in Decision-Making



The Analytical Process

The Decision Styles Survey was administered for 15 years (1985-1999) at the Center for Creative Leadership. Out of 41,000 managers completing the survey, approximately 8,500 were identified by gender (80% male; 20% female). For each of 10 business cases in the survey, managers selected from five options the decision style they each thought most appropriate with regard to including others in the decision process. Their answers were compared to 1800 managers assessed to be “expert” decision-makers. The five possible styles were distributed unequally along a linear scale of inclusion that Vroom and Yetton (1973) defined as ranging from 0 for autocratic to 10 for consensual. The other three styles appeared nominally at 0.6, 5.0 and 8.1 on this scale.

The managers’ decision-style selections were analyzed for both gender and time sensitivity. The decision style choices for all managers were divided into five 3-year increments. In each study, the percentage of managers choosing a particular style for each case was weighted by that style’s position on the inclusion scale. For each case, a score weighted for inclusion was calculated and compared to that of other groups and to the expert score.

Data were also analyzed regarding five key decision factors and the frequency that managers disregarded them in choosing decision styles.

Questions raised by this analysis:

- Why are women generally perceived to be more participative managers?
- Do the women who have risen to higher level management positions between 1985 and 1999 exhibit a typical female management style or has their behavior been modified to succeed in a traditionally male dominated profession?
- Is the preference for inclusion in decision-making cyclical? If so, what factors drive this trend?
- The women in the study were slightly more likely to use both extremes (autocratic and consensual) when it was deemed most appropriate. Are women more flexible decision-makers or did the female managers have to be more flexible just to be in a position to attend the leadership development experience?

References:

Vroom, V. H., & Yetton, P.W. (1973), *Leadership and Decision-Making*, University of Pittsburg Press

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