: How are creativity and imagination related to decision support?

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Think for a moment about decision making. In some situations, alternative actions are obvious or can be discovered easily. Much is known about these structured situations and we can often find approaches to solve these choice situations. Decision support is valuable in some of these situation to help examine trade-offs and explore consequences. As the situation becomes messier and less structured, human decision makers can benefit from novel decision support that enhances human capabilities and supports analysis, creativity and imagination. Building such systems is a daunting task, but one that is increasingly needed and should be valued in coping with the volatile, uncertain world of today and the increasingly ambiguous future for most organizations. The complexity of current decision situations is increasing and potentially relevant data is increasingly available.

Data becomes valuable and useful through the imaginative insight of the analyst, designer and user. Creativity helps a decision maker apply any understanding acquired from computerized decision support and analytics.

Franken (1994) defines creativity "as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others (p. 396)." Imagination is generally defined as the ability to mentally visualize something that is not real, to described a change or to identify new and creative ideas. Creativity and imagination are often intertwined in discussions of the abilities.

Creativity, imagination, and intuition are valued traits for a user of a computerized decision support system. Creativity is also important for a DSS builder. Creative people can view the world from alternative perspectives and can generate new possibilities, actions or alternatives, cf., Franken (1994).

Talents such as creativity, imagination, or intuition should not be ignored by the designer of an decision support artifact, the manager of artifact users, or the user. DSS promote rationality and sometimes encourage creative analysis and response, but the background, preparation and talent of a user of a system constrains its usefulness and the outcomes from its use. We need to examine the entire system if we seek ways to increase decision making effectiveness.

References

Franken, R. E., Human Motivation, (3rd ed.), Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1994.

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