

: *What are examples of decision support paradoxes?*

by Dan Power

Editor, DSSResources.com

Computerized decision support remains controversial. One goal of decision support is to improve decision making and that means helping decision makers resolve or avoid decision support paradoxes. Is this possible? What help can decision support provide decision makers? A paradox is defined as a conflicted, contradictory situation or statement. Examples of decision support paradoxes include the famous Abilene paradox (Harvey, 1974), the Groupthink phenomenon, and the paradox of the good and evil of Technology. There are many hard to resolve decision support paradoxes.

According to Harvey (1974), people may decide on an action none of them prefer because they mistakenly think other members of the group want or prefer that alternative. This is the Abilene paradox. Computerized decision support can increase or decrease this phenomenon depending upon how preferences are elicited and how group communication is managed.

In a group there is sometimes a strong desire for harmony or conformity. This desire can result in dysfunctional decision-making outcomes. This phenomenon is called Groupthink and is similar to the Abilene paradox. Group members are reluctant to disagree.

The paradox of the good and evil of technology is troubling for some. Technology eliminates some tasks and disrupts organizations, but it can increase profitability and improve productivity. Decision support can improve decision making, but the technologies can be used to invade privacy and restrict individual liberty.

Some people prefer decisions based upon their self-interest even when they are worse off in the long run. Perceived self-interest in the short-run may be a mistake in the longer term.

The paradox of unintended consequences is that some people claim credit for unintended positive consequences and blame unintended bad consequences upon circumstances beyond their control. Accidents do happen.

Evidence suggests using techniques like the devil's advocate can reduce some biases and improve decision making outcomes (Janis and Mann, 1977), but few people want to serve that role and be

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the "devil's advocate". As Seager notes "A dialectic approach means equally judging both sides of any argument." Having a designated "devil's advocate" improves the argument.

Perceptions of the "best" decision making method may change during decision making processes. What was considered the "best" approach for a particular decision making task is relative to its perceived success.

Decision support presents the ultimate paradox in that some people don't think they need assistance or support. They are reluctant to use tools and then when a decision appears worse, they argue "the tool doesn't help" or "see using the tool was a waste of time". Some people don't want to use software to assist in decision making. Perhaps they believe "Decision support is good for others, but not for me". This statement is a paradox. The person is trapped and tries to share the misery.

In conclusion, decision support can only help those who want to be helped.

References

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