: How do decision situations differ?

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Decision situations differ in terms of structure, complexity, uncertainty, and importance to name a few situational factors. In different situations, the form (autocratic, consultative or group), process, and decision-making support should be explicitly chosen. How managers respond to routine or non-routine situations does matter.

The Cynefin framework is a conceptual framework used to aid decision-making. It was created in 1999 by Dave Snowden when he worked for IBM Global Services. Cynefin is a "sense-making device" or thinking tool. The original Cynefin framework identified four decision contexts or situations: 1) simple, 2) complicated, 3) complex, or 4) chaotic (Snowden & Boone, 2007). More recently, Cynefin includes five decision-making contexts or "domains" — 1) obvious (known until 2014 as simple), 2) complicated, 3) complex, 4) chaotic, and 5) disorder — that help managers to identify how they perceive situations and make sense of their own and other people's behaviour.

Some decisions are irrevocable. These situations lead to a choice similar to when Julius Ceasar crossed the Rubicon. An ancient Roman law forbade any general from crossing the Rubicon River and entering Italy proper with a standing army. To do so was treason. When Julius Caesar was about to cross the tiny Rubicon River in 49 B.C.E., he quoted from a play by the the Greek author Menander and said in Greek "anerriphtho kybos!" or "let the die be cast". The "crossing the Rubicon" metaphor means that in a decision situation one is taking an irrevocable step that commits one to a specific course.

The number of simple situations encountered by managers appears to be decreasing proportionately while more complex, complicated, and even chaotic situations are increasing. Fortunately, the proportion of chaotic situations remains low.

References

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