

Decision-Making Paradigms, Work Place Dynamics, and Their Applications

Tiffany J. Smith

City University of Seattle

Abstract: *This paper applies decision-making paradigms to responsible leadership, group dynamics, ethics, and risk assessment within the workplace. The paradigms discussed are the responsible leadership paradigm, connectedness paradigm, local community paradigm, and the organization design and developmental paradigm. Each paradigm will be discussed as it relates to a corresponding work place dynamic with a discussion of its application in the environment of a college or university.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Each work place is unique in the dynamics that can effect decision-making either positively or negatively. Depending on the type of dynamic being discussed, specific paradigms may be more beneficial than others to produce the best decision among the leadership team for the organization. This is particularly true among the college environment, but carries over into most organizations that rely on a team atmosphere. For example, a non-profit organization will need to address decision-making issues using an ethically-based paradigm, such as the local community paradigm which centers decision making on what is best for the community rather than the organization itself. Each paradigm discussed in this paper addressed the ways in which particular dynamics are better suited for certain paradigms, which include responsible leadership, group dynamics, ethics, and risk assessment within the work place, and thus fostering positive decision-making.

2. WORKPLACE DYNAMICS, PARADIGMS, AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

2.1. Responsible Leadership – A Dynamic and Paradigm

Responsible leadership requires the constant effort to learn new trends and new methods that will benefit the organization, prevent potential issues, and stay informed on the current trends in the industry. Responsible leadership means being proactive within the respective industry (Smit, 2013). While a leader holds the responsibility to remain fresh to their respective industries, they are also responsible for paying forward the knowledge to their followers as well. This helps to ensure the company's team members are equally informed on new standards and methods in their industry, but prepares them for future potential work in the company (Smit, 2013). Employees thus are better able to represent the company in any atmosphere and thus, shape the future of the company.

2.1.1. Application

The decisions surrounding the dynamics of responsible leadership, such as being proactive in solving issues before they arise, or planning for future trends long before they are in the lime light of the what is new and up in coming have the potential to be highly positive to the organization as a whole as well as team members. Ybarra (2014) expresses the idea of emotional intelligence as it relates to work place dynamics that shows a clear connection between the responsibilities of leaders to assess their own emotional barriers, but also address those of their followers, which improve the relationships between team members. In addition, monitoring individual feels and emotions allows the individual to critically think about the decisions and separate those feelings, thereby guiding individual thoughts and actions (Ybarra, 2014). This gives leaders and followers alike a much better chance at to head issues off at the pass and prepare for the best approach to produce the most lucrative and successful results.

An example of a situation which would call for the responsible leadership paradigm would be in the case of a college with dwindling enrollment due to other places of higher education offering more relevant degree or training programs such as in the field of IT or an expanding nitch-market. An

organization must be vigilant in spotting current trends and devising a way to create a foot-hold in an up-in-coming field before other colleges. Not only will the leadership team be able to improve their enrollment and retention rates this way, but they will also be providing members of the community with needed skills for the new field. This, in turn, supports the local economy with ready workers.

2.2. Connectedness Paradigm - Group Dynamics

In the context of group dynamics, the connectedness paradigm, as explained by Shukun (2013), states that group members should focus on the reciprocated purpose connectedness principle (2013). This principle highlights the common ground, such as an end goal, in which all parties are able to come together and promote an effective and agreed upon solution. In addition, finding common ground in one aspects can lead to finding common ground in other aspects, thereby pulling groups together to focus on a mutual goal. However, getting to the point of finding common ground may be a challenge for a leader who is unfamiliar with their team, or the team currently being used do not complement one another in terms of skill sets. Cronin and Weignart (2011) provide a detailed case study which addresses the implications of group dynamics should team members lack common ground. In these cases, it is up to the leader to forge a common ground with their team members by focusing on an a collective end goal and developing needed skills to address a particular situation.

In addition to group dynamics and the need for common ground is the idea of reciprocal influence over time (Cronin &Weignart, 2011). Once the connectedness paradigm is fostered, members of the group become reciprocal in their duties by helping one another and developing methods for complimenting one another's skill sets and developing a working relationship that can be used again later. It should be noted that this aspect of group dynamics is one that takes considerable time to foster and the leadership team member, or team, should be prepared to provide substantial support and intervention to cultivate a strong connectedness paradigm within group dynamics (Cronin &Weignart, 2011).

2.2.1. Application

The Connectedness paradigm in the context of group dynamics works exceedingly well because the characteristics focus exclusively on a commutative goal. Each member contributes their own strengths with a common goal in mind. However, just as with any large group of people working together, there must be strong leadership involved to make the final decisions or issues within the group dynamics may arise. Group members may not see eye to eye on the best avenue to take to reach the end goal, or there may be issues within leadership when agreements are unable to be made. A strong leader to foresee and adjust the group as needed to work cooperatively is essential to the connectedness paradigm.

In the realm of the worldplace, the connectedness paradigm is one which may be used in any environment that requires the use of a team-like atmosphere or project-based teamwork. In the case of a college or university for example, such as committee, the connectedness paradigm would foster team work through unique skill sets in order to meet a common goal, such as funding for a specific purpose, the hiring of new personnel, or event planning. Group members may devise ways in which their unique skill sets may work well together or individual to meet the deadlines and achieve the overall goal of the project. Leadership is then able to provide support to team members and help guide their talents in a way that best suits the situation.

2.3. Local Community Paradigm – Ethics

The local community paradigm is surrounded with a conscious consideration from the ethics of decision making. Wood and Hilton (2012) state that with the best interests of the community and doing whatever is necessary for the greater good is placed at the forefront of a decision making process rather than the outcomes of the company. This paradigm suites the needs of non-profits nicely, however, is not as effective when placed in the context of a for-profit business. The reason being that for-profits operate in the best interest of the company's profit margin. This does not been the company is completely unethical, but the dynamics are quite different when compared to the higher ethical priority as their non-profit counter parts.

Non-profits, on the other hand, such as non-profit organizations and colleges place have a operation foundation which places the needs and development of the individual and community as their primary motivation (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Degrassi, Morgan, Walker, Wang and Sabat, (2012) reflect on the subject of diversity within the ethical dynamics of decision making by expressing the idea that due to the diverse population, the decision making should always take into account the individual feelings

and moral obligation to the community. This idea fits well into that of Wood and Hilton's (2012) local community paradigm which supports this same notion that the community at large should be at the heart of decision making responsibilities.

2.3.1. Application

The Local Community Paradigm is one which may use components of the connectedness paradigm such as a long term end goal at the focus with community/group members working together to reach said goal. However, this paradigm would cause issues in decision making should community/group members feel unsure about the solutions or should the end goal become of issue (May, Mencl, & Huang, 2014). With different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences at play, the group leader must be able to work with each member in such a way that encourages diverse ideas and skills while maintaining the status quo.

In addition, as a way to help create a foundation for understanding ethics as it relates to workplace dynamics, Christian and Gumbus (2009) provided a list of scenarios regarding ethical dilemmas in the work place to help students in particular, but any member of an organization interested in expanding their understanding of workplace ethics can certainly find use in the critical thinking practices of ethical dilemma analysis. By contemplating the vast array of ethical dilemmas within an organization, team members are able to assess their own feelings and emotions on the topics and better connect the concept discussed in responsible leadership dynamics.

An example of this sort of paradigm is presented in the college setting, which places the needs of the students and community first. This goes far beyond providing education services to students, but also awareness on common issues in society, community resources, employment assistance, health care resources, etc. While some of these services may not be entirely cost effective for the college, but provide highly needed services to a population which may not otherwise have access to said services. Leadership teams operating with the local community paradigm in mind often have difficult decisions to make in regards to tight funding and which services or programs should be given priority and will face ethical dilemmas. In such cases, the leadership team will need to focus on risk assessments based on forecasting potential issues should funding or decisions be made in regards to cuts or removal of certain programs what will ultimately be the best decision for the community at large.

2.4. Organizational Design Paradigm and the Developmental Paradigm - Risk Assessment

The organization design and developmental paradigm centers on the idea that organizations should focus on facilitating company while maximizing the quality of those decisions. This involves assessment of the organization's goals, problems, and the best possible solutions (Huber, 1986). Likewise, one of the key characteristics of a prepared leader is understanding the usefulness of reflection through analysis and the strength to make sound decisions (Welter & Egmon, 2006). In order to create the best solutions and evolve the companies to ever more efficient and profitable levels, risk assessments become a major activity to be conducted regularly. The developmental Paradigm discussed by Neill (2014) highlights the aspect of conducting assessments and evaluations in order to spot issues, access risks, and produce solutions, which connects the ideas to that of a traditional organizational design paradigm.

2.4.1. Application

The organizational and developmental paradigms are vital to risk assessment since any decisions made must have extensive risk assessment associated with it by the leader and/or team. Risk assessment within the group dynamics show the team members the leadership's ability to forecast issues and be vigilant in the understandings issues and solutions. The group dynamics may change as risk assessments are performed due to the modeling of the leaders which will in turn create team members who are also more proactive in their respective departments or tasks. However, it could also increase anxiety if team members see leaders become obsessed with risk assessments and create an unease within the group dynamics (Huber, 1986).

Risk management in organizational and developmental paradigms in an organization, such as college or university, can be used best with large scale problems, such as campus safety or even accreditation issues. Forming a team or committee that specifically looks at the risks associated with different solutions is vital. However, equally as important when a dead line, such as accreditation audits or applications, is keeping in line with a well-developed and organized plan. For this paradigm to work however, the leader(s) must be strong willed and focused on the goal to ensure compliance, attention

to detail, and the energy is well cultivated. Should a leader or the team waiver, the dynamic will suffer, thus causing the goal fall short and the paradigm flounder.

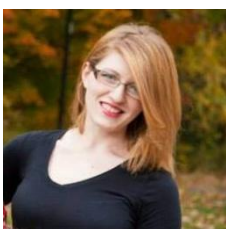
3. CONCLUSION

There is a plethora of dynamics and paradigms within any workplace, the combinations of which may yield either positive effects in the decision-making process, or vastly negative. Different paradigms may be needed for different dynamics, depending on the situation at hand. Because of this, it is important to understand the key elements of each and how the application effects the dynamics of workplace. Welter and Egmon (2012) stated that part of the survival of any organization rests in the ability of the leader, or organization as whole, to sense and respond to changes in the environment and respond quickly and appropriately. Thus, understanding the best paradigm for a given dynamic is essential, with the acceptance that one may not be the right fit for all.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Tiffany Smith is currently a doctoral student at City University of Seattle in the Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership program. She holds both an M.A. and B.A. in English with a concentration in pedagogy and literature. In addition, she currently teaches English Composition and Literature courses and works as a Learning Coach and Mentor to undergraduate students.