DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 443 EA 014 616

AUTHOR Hughes, Abby L.; Ogawa, Rodney T.
TITLE The Decision Seminar as a Training Framework: An Exploratory Assessment.
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; *Decision Making; Educational Administration; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Models; Observation; Outcomes of Education; Problem Solving; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Decision Seminars

ABSTRACT

To explore the utility of decision seminars as instructional tools in educational administration training, researchers observed two one-quarter graduate courses in educational administration at Ohio State University. In the courses--one with 13 students, the other with 18--the decision seminar was used as an instructional framework within which planning and problem-solving simulations were conducted. The decision seminar is a social planning and problem-solving model comprising five components: (1) the management framework or setting for decision-making, (2) five problem-solving tasks, (3) a model identifying seven social process elements, (4) eight community value categories, and (5) a decision phase analysis that identifies six implementation and evaluation steps. Course observation and interviews with course participants indicate that four types of learning outcomes in the classes could be attributed to the decision seminar framework. The first two types included prescriptive (or normative) learning about the way decision-making should be structured and descriptive learning about the process by which decisions are made. The second two types involved prescriptive and descriptive learning about the collection and use of information needed for making a decision. (Author/RW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Rodney T. Ogawa
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED216443

THE DECISION SEMINAR AS A TRAINING FRAMEWORK: AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT

Abby L. Hughes
Board of Cooperative Educational Services
Port Chester, New York

Rodney T. Ogawa
Department of Educational Administration
The University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah

A paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Educational Research Association; March, 1982, in New York, New York. Permission to quote from this paper must be secured from the authors.

EA 014 616

Introduction

The Decision Seminar is a social planning and problem solving model based upon Lasswell's (1971) conceptual view of the policy sciences. It is intended to produce better informed decisions. To this end, the Decision Seminar provides a structure and process designed to identify problems describe a problem's historical, political, social, and environmental contexts; assess information; analyze and select alternative solutions; and develop and evaluate implementation strategies. That the Decision Seminar can produce such results in actual decision making and problem solving situations has been tentatively established in several applications. (Randolph and Herr, 1977; Cunningham, 1981)

It was reasoned that if the Decision Seminar could instruct the deliberations of educational policy planners, then it might also serve as an instructional tool in the training of educational administrators. Thus, the Decision Seminar was employed as the principal instructional framework in several courses offered in the Academic Faculty of Educational Administration of The Ohio State University.

During two of these courses, the authors participated as teaching assistants. What follows is an assessment of the utility of the Decision Seminar as a training device based upon our observations.

Method

Because the use of the Decision Seminar as an instructional tool was a novel application, we chose to take an open-ended, exploratory approach to assessment. We felt that in this initial stage a highly structured design aimed at testing the existence of pre-specified outcomes would be unduly constraining.

Data Collection

The authors attended all sessions and planning sessions of two graduate classes in Educational Administration. Each class was conducted over the duration of one, ten week quarter. We compiled notes based upon our observations. In addition, we systematically reviewed the official minutes of each session's deliberations.

We also interviewed class participants to either gather general impressions or to check our interpretations of observed patterns.

Analysis

Analysis was conducted concurrently with the gathering of data. As observations were compiled, we developed tentative interpretations which were tested in subsequent observations (Guba, 1978). Eventually this process resulted in the distillation of the dimensions reported below.

Limitations

The limitations of this assessment approach are the following. The findings cannot be generalized to other settings or, indeed, even to other courses at the same institution. Moreover, that the observed outcomes resulted from the Decision Seminar remains open to conjecture. The existence of such causality can, of course, be more clearly established under controlled, comparative conditions.

The Setting

The two courses in which the application of the Decision Seminar was observed were both regular offerings in the Academic Faculty of Educational Administration of the Ohio State University. Both courses were taught by the same instructor, an individual who had a great deal of experience in applying the Decision Seminar. In both courses, the Decision Seminar was

employed as a framework within which a planning or problem solving simulation was conducted. Each student adopted the role of an actor in the decision process.

The first course, offered during the spring of 1978, focused upon critical issues facing urban school systems. The majority of the 13 students were completing certification requirements and three were doctoral students.

The second course, offered during the winter of 1979, focused upon the politics of education. All 18 students were doctoral students in the third of a required four course sequence.

Findings

As we began to collect and interpret observations, it became clear that several emerging instructional outcomes could not be confidently credited to the Decision Seminar over other possible explanations. For example, that students developed skills to cope with interpersonal conflict, constrained time frames, and a lack of continuity from session to session could easily be ascribed to either their involvement in simulated decision situations or their exposure to the Decision Seminar.

Thus, we made a conscious decision to employ the elements of the Seminar to guide our identification of instructional outcomes. While we clearly ran the risk of tautology by taking this approach, we felt that we had no other way of connecting outcomes to the use of the Seminar. Further, we decided that the conclusions of such an exploratory assessment would be treated as tentative and could serve as the basis for subsequent, experimental work.

The Instructional Dimensions

We identified two dimensions in which the Decision Seminar provided instruction. The first concerns two types of information implicit in the

Seminar structure. Lasswell (1971) argued that there exists information both of and in the process of policy formulation. That is, there is information about how policy is developed as well as information or data that are considered in the development process. We found that students who were exposed to the Decision Seminar tended to develop an understanding of both types of information.

The second dimension involves the normative and descriptive learnings developed by students exposed to the Decision Seminar. The Seminar provides a sequential outline of steps and processes which, if followed, can contribute to the making of better informed decisions. This normative element provides direction and focus, insuring the nurturance and growth of problem related information which leads to the identification of solutions.

The Decision Seminar can also produce descriptive learnings in that it provides a framework within which students can conduct retrospective analyses of decision-making processes.

By combining these two dimensions in a matrix (See Figure 1), we were able to reflect the four types of learning outcomes observed to have resulted from the application of the Decision Seminar--prescriptions on information of the process, prescription on information in the process, description of the information of the process, and descriptions of information in the process.

In the remainder of the paper, we will explain how the Decision Seminar was observed to contribute to these four types of learnings. We will begin by describing the total model. Then, we will specify which elements of the model bore on each type of learning.

The Decision Seminar

The Decision Seminar is comprised of five major components--a management framework, problem solving tasks, a social process model, community value categories, and a decision phase analysis.

Figure One

Type of Learning That Result From

The Decision Seminar

Information		Prescriptive	Descriptive
	of the process	Prescriptions of information of the process	Descriptions of information of the process
	in the process	Prescriptions of information in the process	Descriptions of information in the process

The Management Framework. The management framework is concerned with the characteristics of an ideal setting in which policy decisions can be made. It identifies six important elements:

1. A permanent core of three to fifteen individuals is responsible for concept exploration, data identification and gathering, agenda construction and evaluation.
2. A permanent location with facilities to array and store data. The room becomes the integrator of people and information where visual displays of ongoing work provide past, present, and future perspectives.
3. High technology equipment should be available to analyze, store, display and project data, as it is generated; such as use of: microcomputers, network systems, opaque projectors, etc. Problems can then be examined within their entire contexts.
4. Research is a shared task of all participants as the need for accurate, relevant information is continuous. As information is introduced, the core group is responsible to validate its usefulness and accuracy, and either accept, revise, or reject.
5. The use of outside experts is invaluable to the core members for the input of needed data.
6. Record keeping not only supplied one source of data but provides members with an ongoing link between the core's objectives (as specified in the agenda) and the participants' contributions.

The stage is set. A committed, permanent core group is identified; a designated room is outfitted to store, retrieve and display information; provisions are made for access to "outside experts;" the core group has developed and identified research gathering and assessing strategies;

provisions for record keeping of the agenda and selections of the minutes are made.

Problem Solving Tasks. The second component of the Decision Seminar is comprised of a set of "problem solving tasks." These five tasks specify the analytical procedures that provide the core group members with direction and focus, insuring the proper collection and analysis of problem and/or decision related information. They are, in sequence:

1. Goal clarification - identify practical future desired states.
2. Trend description - gather and examine past and current trends in respect to the stated goals.
3. Analysis of conditions - what conditions have affected or conditioned the trends?
4. Projection of development - if no change or interventions are made, what will be the future states or events?
5. Identification of alternatives - based on the accumulated data, alternatives are generated and assessed in terms of feasibility and effectiveness in meeting goals, resulting in selection of an alternative strategy to implement.

Social Process Model. The third component is the "social process model." It identifies several elements which can affect a social process. It may be utilized to provide greater insight and depth of data in the analysis of the trends and descriptions which occur in the problem solving steps three and four described above. This model delineates the social processes into the following elements:

1. Stakeholders - identify the person(s) who are directly involved or interested in the policy (problem or plan) under consideration.

2. Perspectives - identify the views of the stakeholders. What do they think about an issue?

3. Situation - describe the situations in which the stakeholders interact with the institution. Describe the contact and communications that take place.

4. Base values - identify the values and beliefs of the stakeholders toward the policy (plan or problem solution). What assets or capabilities do they possess?

5. Outcomes - identify the outcomes sought by stakeholders.

6. Effects - determine the net redistribution of values that the policy (plan or problem solution) may potentially have upon stakeholders.

7. Strategies - develop strategies that utilize the understanding of the stakeholders' values and beliefs to positively effect the acceptance of the policy (plan or solution).

Application of the Social Process Model provides a means for gathering information which is salient to understanding the trends and conditions of the proposed policy (problem or plan). It also refines the Decision Phase Analysis (described later) incorporating the requisite component of cooptation into the implementation of a new policy (plan or solution).

Community Value Categories. To facilitate gathering data and focusing direction on the Social Process Model, eight "community value categories" (The Decision Seminar's fourth component) may be used as guides to analysis. They provide insight into the contextual setting of the proposed policy (plan or solution). When applied to all or to selected elements of the social processes, the value categories can aid in the description and analysis of the social values of those potentially affected by a decision. The value categories are:

1. Wealth - financial resources
2. Power - Control of decision making
3. Enlightenment - creation and/or communication of knowledge
4. Well-being-contributing to individual or societal "health"
5. Skill - contributing to the development of skills and abilities
6. Affection - encouraging growth of intimacy, friendship and loyalty
7. Respect - situations or groups accorded esteem or recognition
8. Rectitude - Contributing to the development of integrity and virtue

Decision Phase Analysis. The final component is the "decision phase analysis." It is intended to guide the core group in designing implementation and evaluation strategies for the selected policy (plan or solution). The six decision phases are:

1. Intelligence - identify the information that needs to be collected to support or "sell" a strategy.
2. Promotion - identify individuals in positions to adopt the proposed strategy. Develop appropriate promotion techniques.
3. Prescription - formulate the proposed strategy in legislative or policy terms.
4. Invocation - prepare for the eventual implementation of the strategy, taking into consideration the affected parties, their perspectives, values, etc.
5. Application - identify and describe the step-by-step implementation process.
6. Appraisal - develop formative and summative evaluation methods based on the stated goals.

The Decision Seminar, then, is a decision making model which goes beyond conventional, sequential models by prescribing the creation of the culture and

environment in which decisions are made. What learnings can result for students of educational administration who are exposed to the Seminar?

The Learning Outcomes of Exposure to the Decision Seminar

As indicated earlier, we identified four basic types of learning that might be attributed to the exposure of students to the Decision Seminar. They are: prescriptions on information of the process, description of information of the process, prescriptions of information in the process, and descriptions of information in the process. (see Figure 2)

Prescriptions on information of the process. This type of instructional outcome concerns knowledge about the way a decision making process should be structured. We found that three components of the Decision Seminar seemed to be linked to this outcome. They were the "management framework," the "five problem solving," and the "decision phase analysis." Each of these components spells out either the conditions in which a decision should be made or the specific steps that should be taken in the making of the decision, itself.

The "management framework" presented six characteristics of an ideal decision-making context. The "problem solving tasks" specified the analytical procedures by which decision-relevant was to be collected and analyzed by the student. Finally, the "decision phase analysis" guided students in designing implementation and evaluation strategies.

Descriptions of information of the process. This second type of instructional outcome involves the ability to retrospectively assess a decision making process. We need to emphasize here that we do not mean the assessment of a decision, the final alternative selected, but the process by which it was derived. Not surprisingly, the three Decision Seminar components linked to the first type of outcome were also found to be tied to descriptions of information

Figure Two

Decision Seminar Components

and

Learning Outcomes

		Prescriptive	Descriptive
Information	of the process	1. Management Framework 2. Problem Solving Tasks 3. Decision Phase Analysis	1. Management Framework 2. Problem Solving Tasks 3. Decision Phase Analysis
	in the process	1. Problem Solving Tasks 2. Social Process Model 3. Value Categories 4. Decision Phase Analysis	1. Problem Solving Tasks 2. Social Process Model 3. Value Categories 4. Decision Phase Analysis

of the process.

Just as the "management framework," the "five problem solving tasks," and the "decision phase analysis" were found to guide class participants in their deliberations, they also provided a framework within which participants analyzed and assessed actual cases of planning and/or problem solving to which they had been exposed.

For example, several students noted that the "management framework" had led them to focus upon the influences that uneven participation or the inconsistency of meeting times and location can have on a decision-making effort. Others mentioned that the "five problem solving tasks," unlike conventional guides to rational decision-making, helped them to see the importance of considering developing trends. Finally, students observed that the "decision phase analysis" had caused them to rethink their failure in past decision-making situations to develop well planned strategies to promote their ideas.

Prescription of information in the process. The third type of outcome identified concerns the type of information that should be collected for and used in making a decision. We found that four of the Decision Seminar's five components appeared to be associated with this outcome type. These were the "problem solving tasks," the "social process model," community value categories," and "the decision phase analysis."

The "problem solving tasks" specified that information concerning past and current trends relevant to the focal decision be collected. The "social process model" prescribed the collection of information pertinent to this analysis of trends. It directed students to gather and analyze data concerning individuals affected by the decision. These data involved stakeholders' thoughts about the impending decision, their values, and what they sought to

gain.

The "community value categories" further directed efforts to analyze the social process affecting the decision. By placing each of the decision's "stakeholders" into one of eight value categories, students developed a clearer understanding of the web of values which served as an important dimension of the context in which the decision was being made.

Finally, the "decision phase analysis" guided the students to collect information needed to promote the strategy they proposed to implement their decision.

Descriptions of information in the process. The fourth and final type of learning outcome we found to result from the application of the Decision Seminar as an instructional tool involves the ability to describe and assess the use of information in the making of a decision. We again found that both prescriptive of descriptive outcomes involving a given type of information resulted from the same set of Decision Seminar components. In this case we found that the four components found to be linked to the third type of outcome were also apparently linked to this last type.

Students remarked that the "problem solving tasks" helped them to not only structure decision making situations but also to place actual decision making processes in which they had participated into their contexts of trends. Similarly, they commented that their introduction to the "social process model" caused them to consider how the analysis of individuals and groups with vested interests in a decision, stakeholders, might have affected these same decisions. Extending this point a bit further, several noted that they found the "community values categories" to be a useful way to describe and analyze the societal pressures that had been exerted on decision making.

Students also observed that exposure to the "decision phase analysis" helped them to assess the extent to which information had been gathered and

utilized to promote a strategy of implementation in decision making processes which they had observed.

Discussion and Conclusions

It was, perhaps, not surprising that we found that the use of the Decision Seminar resulted in prescriptive outcomes for students regarding how a decision making process should be carried out. That, afterall, is the purpose of the model--to guide decision makers towards the making of better informed decisions. What was less predictable were the descriptive outcomes. Although the Decision Seminar has been employed as the conceptual framework of case studies of actual decision making processes it was not the primary use for which the Seminar was intended.

This brings to mind Eisner's (1979) conceptualizations of the explicit and implicit curricula. He argues that instruction results in intended outcomes, the explicit, as well as unintended ones, the implicit. He also suggested that learning results from the exclusion of information or perspectives. This he dubbed the "null" curriculum. Thus, the prescriptive outcome types we observed might be viewed as the explicit curriculum, while the descriptive outcome types might be seen as the implicit curriculum. That is, it was expected that students would be able to employ the Seminar as a guide to making decisions--it was unaboidable given the way in which the courses were structured. However, it was not expected that students would transfer their learning from the class situation to the retrospective description and analysis of actual decision making processes.

As we stated earlier, these results should be viewed with some skepticism. The exploratory assessment methods employed in this study were intended to provide only tentative results. However, we believe that our findings are well grounded in data and, thus, can provide the foundation for more closely controlled studies to determine the extent to which they are the result of the application of the Decision Seminar as an instructional tool.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Cunningham, L. L. Applying Laswell's concepts in field situations: Diagnostic and prescriptive values. Educational Administration Quarterly, 17, Spri[illegible] 1981, 21-44.

2. Eisner, E. W. The educational imagination. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

3. Guba, E. G. Toward a methodology of naturalistic inquiry in educational evaluation. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Evaluation, UCLA Graduate School of Education, 1978.

4. Lasswell, H. A preview of policy sciences. New York: American Elsevier, 1971.

5. Randolph D. W. & Hoerr, T. R. St Louis Public Schools Issues Seminar Evaluation Report. St. Louis: St. Louis Public Schools, 1977.