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THE ROLE OF INTUITION IN MILITARY DECISIONS

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***Abstract**: Over the course of history, the decision-making process was at stake for many military commanders and their ability to act in critical situations. All historical events occurred as a result of powerful people making either a beneficial or detrimental decision. Therefore, the first part of the paper will be focused on the importance and the main elements of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the complexities of this process will be displayed along with the limitations that can influence the decision-maker. Also, the approach that a leader might choose affects the outcome of a specific situation. In the second part, attention will be directed at intuition as a favorable attribute for the leaders of the armed forces and how it can be taught in order to achieve the intuitive judgement necessary in the military. This paper's goal is to analyze the effectiveness of using intuition in the military decision-making process rather than the rational evaluation that has been used and taught for years. Because military circumstances are so fluid these days, the decision-making process is hampered by a dangerous tempo of action, disordered intelligence, and agitated activity rather than a basic, easy-to-implement approach. In such situations, decision-making is rarely clear and objectively rational but rather intuitive.*

***Keywords**: decision-making; intuition; comparative evaluation; singular evaluation; intuitive judgement; gut-feeling.*

Introduction

Making decisions in the military is vital for the smooth running of events and also for achieving the desired results in a given situation. The decision-making process is a complex one and has been studied for a very long time, but there is no defining solution for each and every situation yet. Because the armed forces are involved in many activities, so are the ways of making a decision. This has been thoroughly studied by several entities and disciplines, including psychology, economics, sociology, political science, biology, and other areas of financial administration.

Through the years, the best approach to finding a solution to a military problem has been through the analytical method, by comparing two or more options and choosing the one that fits the most into the context. That specific choice was then optimized by adding or eliminating elements to make it more efficient. But all this process was taking too long, and by the time the final decision was made, the facts of the situation might have already changed, which led to starting over the whole process. In order to find a more efficient solution, people started to observe other ways of making decisions by using their intuitive judgement. The roots of the term intuition date back to the 17th century, when strategist Miyamoto Musashi [1]mentioned intuition as part of strategic thinking ("Develop intuitive judgement and understanding for everything.[…]only then you will come to […] be able to win with your eye " (Musashi, 49). Intuition is an attribute that has caught the attention of military leaders in particular, who want to define and use it in the decision-making process both in peacetime and in wartime.

[1] **Miyamoto Musashi** was a Japanese swordsman, philosopher, strategist and writer, who became renowned through stories of his unique double-bladed swordsmanship. Musashi emphasized the "Way of Strategy," taking an overall view of a conflict and devising the best method for countering the enemy's attack, rather than just focusing on technical skills and execution (Contributors).

1. The process of decision-making using Recognition Primed Decision (RPD) Model

In the process of solving everyday problems, an individual has a set of alternatives, being conscious of the possible outcomes, either positive or negative, for each of them. On the theoretical side, a rational person will make a decision based on analyzing all the options that are available and choosing the optimal one (Simon 1987, 205). Many domains of expertise, like psychology, economic, social, and political sciences, or biology, have studied individual behavior in order to find the appropriate way of working through the decision process. An important role regarding decisions rests in the information that one has, but more importantly than that is the way he or she uses the information, how familiar with that information he or she is, or the amount of information that he has.

In this regard, Gary Klein proposed the recognition primed decision[2] (Klein 1999, 15-16) (RPD) model (Klein 1999, 46-51) which takes into account what all the disciplines mentioned above have studied for a long time. For a better understanding of the decision cycle, this model integrates two processes: how decision makers develop a mind map of the issue in order to recognize the proper path of action, and how they evaluate/reevaluate the chosen course of action by mentally picturing it.

The core steps to understanding the RPD model are (Klein 1999, 127-128):

- Recognizing a situation as typical of a familiar occurrence or condition evokes familiarity and allows decision makers to proceed accordingly. They can also recognize an appropriate course of action that can succeed by recognizing a circumstance as usual.
- To recognize which aims are appropriate. The goals are determined based on familiarity, the magnitude of the problem, and an individual's experience;
- To construct cues in order to reduce the amount of vital information to a bare minimum;
- To prepare for the unexpected. They must always be prepared to react quickly and effectively in the event of any surprises.
- To choose the best course of action. A plan of action can be taken and implemented by being informed of the prior phases.

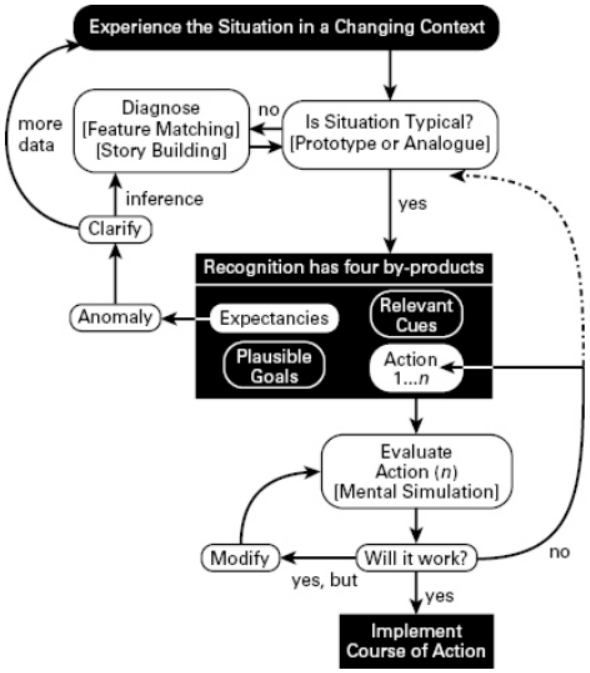

Figure no 1. Recognition Primed Decision Model (Klein 1999, 122)

[2] The Recognition-Primed Decision (RPD) model was created in 1985 by Gary and colleagues Roberta Calderwood and Anne Clinton-Cirocco to explain how experienced fireground commanders could use their expertise to identify and carry out a course of action without having to generate and analyze a set of options. The RPD model's most important claim is that people can use their prior experience to develop a reasonable alternative as the first one they consider. (Klein 1999, 15-16)

A disadvantage of this model is that, no matter the experience and familiarity with the situation, there might be more complex ones, where the decision makers have to put in more effort in order to diagnose the situation correctly, especially in the military, where during a combat operation there is no exact recipe. These are the cases where the gathered information may not perfectly match a previous situation or may be too complex, involving two or more different examples from the past. Therefore, there is a need for more information. Another complication might lie in the misinterpretation of the gathered information, a fact that will lead to the violation of some expectancies. To clarify, the one that makes the decision has to go back to the core steps and find all the flaws that he or she missed the first time.

Another complexity of this model is represented by the action applied. The decision maker has to mentally analyze the actions that can be taken. In a relatively short time, the decision makers have to mentally go through many ideas of how they can handle the situation before applying them. This means that they can compare two or more ideas at once, or go through each individual one. There might be a need to reevaluate and modify the plan until it makes sense, and then implement the course of action. In a tactical scenario, a commander may consider a variety of options based on battlefield information as it becomes available.

2. Approaching paths for decision making

A variety of factors influence the steps for arriving at a solution at the decision level, resulting in varied approaches to the problem. The most common approach is to take two or more viable options for solving a problem and compare all of their aspects, so in the end, only one will be applied. The disadvantage of this strategy is the significant amount of time required to study all of the possibilities, as well as the amount of data that, in some situations, may exceed the decision maker's processing speed. This is the most common strategy in training, since the outcome may be of higher value if each item is carefully examined.

Besides the comparative strategy, there is another one that has a greater impact in critical situations, and that is the singular evaluation approach. Instead of analyzing the options by comparing them, a decision maker will think of the options one at a time, evaluate them in each turn to establish their effectiveness, reject them if they do not meet the desired target, and turn to the next most typical solving technique. Even if the individual has to cycle through several possibilities, he or she has to evaluate each option’s merits.

The first approach consists of analyzing the options and creating an optimized outcome, whilst the second approach looks for the best strategy in a smaller amount of time. In his research, Herbert Simon writes about “rationality and maximizing” identifying a strategy that he calls “satisficing”: using the first approach that works. In these circumstances, the key to simplifying the decision-making process is to substitute the aim of rationalization with the goal of satisficing, i.e., finding a good enough solution in order to find the best move. (Simon 1987, 204-205)

There are a few factors that influence the decision maker’s choice regarding the strategies above. Leaders will most likely choose the comparative evaluation strategy in these cases:

- When there is a need to justify the choice, needing more evidence;
- When there is a need to optimize the solution as much as possible. The decision maker has to take all the facts into account and come up with the best decision;
- When the situation is too complex. There might be too much information to process, which requires time and effort to analyze, so the best approach is the rational one.

On the other hand there is the singular evaluation approach, which uses mental simulation based on the RPD model and it can be applied in other situations such as:

- When time pressure is high, it is impossible to take into account all the details of the situation, therefore the best approach is to choose the closest acceptable option.

- When experience is high. The more experience an individual has, the more confident he or she can be in recognizing a viable approach to the problem.

Besides these two approaches to solving a problem, there are others that can be taken into account when necessary. A simple method called elimination by aspects (Tversky 1972, 284-286) consists of weighting the options against the most important criterion; those that fail to meet that criterion are eliminated; the remaining options are weighed against the next most important criterion; and those that fail to meet that criterion are eliminated, filtering and filtering until only one option remains.

3. Intuition

Understanding and applying intuition in decision making is a challenge for most studies where it is present. What is intuition? How can it be best used in decision making? How does intuition can be taught? How effective is intuition in the military? What are the factors that encourage using intuition to the detriment of rational thinking? These are one of the most common questions in intuition-focused studies that find different answers depending on the author's focus field. To illustrate it, in his paper, Hogarth examines from the psychological point of view how intuition influences our cognitive judgement and decision-making skills (R. M. Hogarth 2010), while Cunningham (Cunningham, et al. 2012) tries to examine how military leaders, as a part of high level organizations, use intuition in the decision-making process and in solving senior level problems. Another example regarding the study of intuition is the work of Gary Klein and his contributors on how certain experts (military leaders, first responders such as firefighters or doctors) use intuitive recognition primed decisions in their professional judgements (Klein 1999).

With a wide range of applications, including increasing confidence and empathy through self-suggestion, following the first thought without hesitation, letting go of prejudices, self-awareness, and overcoming fears, attention to intuition in the decision-making environment has led to a more practical definition of this "sixth sense" in recent decades. Several authors have given the following definitions of intuition:

- John Adair defines intuition as "the power or faculty of immediately apprehending that something is the case[…]without intervention of any reasoning process" (Adair 2002, 94). This is based on the fact that there is no step-by-step reasoning, or any concious analysis of the situation, but a quick and ready insight as– 'I just know'.

- On the same page, Gerd Gigerenzer considers intuition as "a judgement that appears quickly in consciousness, whose underlying reasons we are not fully aware of, and is strong enough to act upon." Also, the author attributes intuition to a non-technical term, which everyone else is familiar with, *gut feeling* (Gigerenzer 2007, 16).

- Gary Klein, on the other hand, has a different version of defining intuition, such as "recognizing things without knowing how we do the recongnizing. We size the situation up and immediately know how to proceed: which goals to pursue, what to expect, how to respond". In other words, he summarizes intuition as the ability to use experience to recognize situations and know how to handle them without much thinking (Klein 1999, 58).

- Hogarth comes forward with his approach, claiming that "the essence of intuition or intuitive responses is that they are reached with little apparent effort, and typically without conscious awareness", being correlated most of the times with *speed* and also with *a sense of confidence* (R. M. Hogarth 2001, 14).

Therefore, intuition represents our capacity to know something and act towards it without conscious judgement; that gut feeling of knowing what it is we have to do, being comfortable and confident that it is a good approach. However, intuition is a term that can be easily confused with instinct or insight, two other concepts that are often used interchangeably in everyday conversations. They have similar meanings, but applied in different concepts, they cannot be that interchangeable. Instinct is an innate inclination or natural skill that cannot be taught, but rather it is inherited. For example, if someone puts their hand on a hot plate, the first reaction (instinct) is to retrieve the hand as fast as possible. Instinct is a survival capability, as opposed to intuition, which is gained via experience and involves a judgment process. On the other hand, insight refers to the ability to get a complete and accurate understanding of someone or something, as well as the ability to "see into" the structure of a situation. (R. M. Hogarth 2010, 339). Both intuition and insight are learning based-processes, but the second one relies on deliberate processes, such as following the proper steps in solving a mathematical problem. They can be related, but not defined as the same attribute.

4. Learning and developing intuition

When a person discovers the meaning of intuition in his or her life, he or she must use it as much as possible, try it in a variety of situations, evaluate what works and what does not, and make adjustments along the way. A mature intuition later in life is more likely to be trusted more than earlier on, because of the massive experience, information gained and practiced in judgement. As a general agreement, even though some of the first actions of leaders in different situations are instinctive, intuition can be shaped only by learning. This process never stops, as there are cases where components of intuition might be upgraded on the way, making it a more trustful aspect in making a decision.

Nevertheless, in order to have a growing intuition, one of the first steps is to accept it as an important element in the making of decisions. Once intuition is treated as a valid tool available to the commanders in the armed forces, the response time for the decision cycle can be massively reduced. That way, the attitude towards intuition as an irrational component will be diminished, therefore leading to the next step, which is to trust the intuitive power.

During the process of becoming an expert, leaders in the armed forces depend on their institutional and personal training, operational and combat experience gained through assignments, and most importantly, the individual training of their abilities. They have to be aware of their personal capabilities and how they can improve in order to make them more efficient. The art of war is not well taught by reading and theoretical learning, but by experience in the combat and operational events. The reason for this is that the theoretical situations are very different from the real ones. In the latter case, the retention of the gained knowledge through experience is higher and of better quality (Saini 2008, 86).

The key aspect of growing intuition lies in experience. Every situation is different, thus our brain’s job is to map out all the facts, including the environment, the variables, and influencing factors, in order to look out for the possible outcomes. A better understanding of the outcomes from a specific situation helps to speed up the process of decision-making. Often, intuition-based decisions seem to appear without too much effort and are more effective regardless of whether the person is familiar with the scenario or not (Young 2015). Experience is very important, but only if it is relevant to the subject. In this case, inexperienced decision makers, such as young leaders, apply mental maps from other domains. They have the ability to see connections and paths that someone more familiar with the situation cannot. It may not have the same impact on the decision as the original, but it can come close. Still, for consistently good results, the decision-making based on intuition depends on the expertise that an individual has in a specific domain.

On another level of growing intuition is to draw connections with other traits that are at hand. One attribute that must be taken into consideration is imagination. Whenever the next move is not obvious, the leader needs his imagination. Military operations, particularly in a conflict context, may not always have a clear path to success. In these circumstances, answers to specific difficulties cannot be found in literature or recalled from personal memory banks. The leader has to think about things and scenarios in a different manner and then test out many choices to get to wherever he needs and wants to be. That is the place where imagination steps in and the leader chooses originality and innovative thinking over tried-and-true methods. However, the leader must exercise caution while using imagination in the decision-making process as it cannot be employed as the primary thinking characteristic. In other words, imagination should be a part of the team, and not the leading entity of it.

Leaders who follow their dreams may be pathfinders, but they may also lead themselves and others into destruction. Only a few people who deviate from well-worn paths are considered explorers. 'Imaginative', 'inventive', and 'adventurous' are admirable qualities, yet unsuccessful imaginative thinkers are described as 'fanciful', 'reckless' and 'mad'. As a result, we must be wary of any tendency to elevate the concept of imagination as a goal in and of itself. People often overlook the fact that a vivid imagination may also be foolish. However, at the leader level, we cannot consider the latter (Adair 2002, 99).

5. Application of intuition in decision-making process

Most tactical leader activities revolve around making decisions to solve difficulties. Living in a dynamic, confusing, and changing world creates an unavoidable result of challenging obstacles: either the leader finds the problem, or the problem finds the leader, as seems to be the case more often. Tactical leadership occurs in a state of flux and ambiguity, and judgments must be taken in light of the environment's complexity, instability, and magnitude. These dynamic circumstances generate scenarios in which decision-making is characterized by a hazardous pace of action, fragmented content, and agitated reactive activity rather than a simple, easy-to-apply procedure. Decision-making in such settings is rarely clean and objectively rational; it is more typically chaotic.

The subjectivity dilemma of military operations can be solved through intuition. War, according to Sun Tzu, is an art governed by five factors, including moral law, heaven, Earth, the commander, method and discipline (Tzu 2009, 3). The most important factor is the commander, who manages to transform, through his decisions war into art. Instead of a single perfect solution, each military situation has a progressive spectrum of potentially workable alternatives. By considering numerous circumstances, a commander will be able to come up with a solution if he wisely uses his vision and innovation. An intuitive commander who understands and anticipates the battle's flow will be able to detect hidden chances and solutions at a higher level.

The process of appreciation of the situation can also be supported by intuition. The commander is expected to make a decision based on the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Because the benefits and drawbacks of a military strategy are not objective, they cannot be correctly defined into a mathematical matrix. Finally, a commander must deal with subjectivity and abstraction while making a choice, just as an examination of the strengths of opposing forces will not predict the outcome of a battle. A commander who can utilize intuition to distinguish how an action plan is developing, will be in a better position to determine a course of action that is favorable for the circumstances.

Also, in dealing with information overload, intuition plays a vital role. The unconscious mind, from which intuition arises, is unlimited in size and capable of processing information in tandem with the conscious mind. The intuitive and inventive commander will

benefit from the fact that his mind will continue to digest information even if his awareness is occupied with other tasks. The intelligence picture of military operations will never be comprehensive and accurate, despite technical advances in reconnaissance and surveillance devices. There will always be some new information and changes that will constantly influence the situation. The battlefield will always be unpredictable and non-linear, positioning war as far as possible from being a science. The dynamic nature of military actions may simply reduce the leaders' time required to process the amount of raw data available. They will be forced to interpret the insufficient information and make decisions accordingly. That is where intuition comes into place and helps the individual go through the decision process more easily.

Conclusion

While dealing with stressful conditions, commanders are overwhelmed with knowledge from every direction, so they have to use their intuitive decision making to rule out options to create a clear evaluation map of the situation. By eliminating elements, the individual can reduce the time required to come up with a course of action. In these kind of situations, neither the comparative evaluation, nor the intuitive one is good or bad. The main point is to create a balance between the two and apply them accordingly.

There is not a specific weight in the decision-making process of how much rationality, intuition or imagination to use. Every situation is different and therefore requires a different approach. Because of their characteristics, most tactical military operations fall on the intuitive side of the decision cycle. During these operations, the complexity of information, the time constraint, and the available tools cannot be efficiently analyzed and optimized in order to come up with the best rational solution, but rather with the most effective response. The difference between a decision made during a planning procedure is totally different than one made in a live military action. The comparative evaluation is more likely to be used during the initial plan with very little intuitive contribution. During the tactical operation, as most of the elements change, the intuitive approach has to take the lead progressively. Also, there are no specific boundaries between when one stops and where another begins. It is up to the decision maker's experience, familiarity with the situation, required time, and his or her state of mind.

As long as intuition is viewed as an useful tool rather than an irrational one, the decision-making process would be more efficient, with good outcomes for the decision maker.

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