

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF GROUP DECISION

**Oleg BUGA**, university professor, habilitated doctor

Alecu Russo Balti State University, Moldova

**Iuliana VORNICU**, first level teacher certification

Liceul Tehnologic „I. V. Liteanu”, Liteni, Suceava, România

*Abstract: A decision has been taken by the selection of alternatives from a variety of options available at a given moment, it is an essential part of our daily life. We will appoint decision „a solution adopted by a system (person, group, organization, mass caterer) with a view of solving a problem”. This situation leads to the approach of making-decision process from completely different perspective from that of individual decision. As it's all about group in human quality to the subject TDM, specific problems arise dynamics of the group. Collective situation becomes a potential source of activation, the mobilization of energy social phenomena. Degree of involvement of participants is different, that is reflected into the dynamic of the group. An attempt was made to identify factors affecting collective decisions. Depending on the nature of the subject problem to discussion group, the rules in relation to which it is adopted decision are different. Groups are heterogeneous by definition: the participants are driven by special interests, each of them with diverse information and different opinions and joins at different values. All these differences are translated by discrepancies, opposition between „agreement” and „disagreement” within the framework of the group. External conflict between a person and other internally transposed by a tension is required to be reduced by solving disagreement. The members of the group have different knowledge, so that the group's knowledge is greater than knowledge held by any of its members. In this case each member of the group has some of the information that the others do not hold. As a result, the knowledge, information, opinions available to each group will determine its initial orientation. In group discussion, it is much more likely that the participants to come up with arguments in favor of its initial attitude, causing segregation among all members of the group. It is shown that the members of the group of decision tend to be far less moderate in assuming decision with increased level of risk, because they believe that the potential negative consequences of their decisions will be responsible for all members of the group.*

From the very beginning, the social psychology has integrated in her research a number of issues: the work and the individual's performance in the corporate context, group problem-solving, policy enablers and inhibitors work group decision, etc. In all experiments on group work are three types of situations, representing actually three steps to involve the actual variable „group” [G. de Montmollin, 1969]. In the first two instances, the activity or performance remains individual, personal, even if the subject works in a corporate context, the experiences of the third category there is a new element: the performance becomes collective.

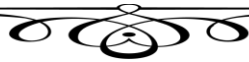
In this case, the group itself becomes the subject of the action; its members are engaged in a common and unique task. So, this time we are situated at the level of interactions between individuals, resulting in an unique resultant, a collective product. Concrete analogy can be found in practical integrated life working group or group discussion and decision, the group of solving problems, in all these situations the product is the result of participants' collaboration.

### 1. Group decision

Making a decision, through an alternative selection from a variety of options available at any given time, is an essential component of our daily lives. We called the decision „a solution adopted by a system (person, group, organization, corporation) to solve a problem” [Zamfir, 1983, p. 158]. If proper social decision-making processes (at group level, community, etc.), subject decider is inhomogeneous: it is no longer a unitary subject but a plurality of subjects who decide together.

This leads to decision-making approach from a perspective quite different from that of individual decision. As regards human as subject group decider, problems specific group dynamics. Collective situation becomes a potential source of activating, mobilizing energy phenomena of social contagion. The Group is therefore not an additive phenomenon, that the benefit is not reducible to a purely statistical effect of „brain summation”: the result beyond – the optimum – the simple arithmetic sum of the resource group.

In practice, situations that occur in group situations are endless. It may happen sometimes the product group to be regarded as a medley that do not recognize anyone. Research has shown that in this respect the collective behavior cannot be compared with that individual. Over the situation simple co-action overlaps a group dynamic rather complex: there is a plurality or a conflict of opinions or



judgments, exchange of information and activities, a process facilitating social suggestion and contagion, a certain volume interaction structure of statuses and roles, etc. The involvement of participants is different, which is reflected in group dynamics. It was tried to identify factors that affect collective decisions. Depending on the nature of the problem subject to discussion group, rules in relation to the resolution that are adopted are different.

In step group discussions previous collective decision itself. When debating an issue of collective opinion, the burden will raise solved a multitude of differentiated positions, often lacking an objective way to determine what is right and what is wrong judgments and opinions of the participants in the discussions. Subjects may feel the need for consensus decision-making, but there is no agreement, the understanding between different people, may cancel previous expectations about widespread agreement: the divergence is most plausible in terms of social and cognitive logic.

In a decision, each subject will have a series of attitudes, judgments and opinions specific socially relevant. As a result, they may experience cognitive or social conflicts arising opinions or judgments participants of divergent judgments sustained by a person in the group against the general opinion of the group etc.

## **2. Convergence towards a group decision**

First studies on collective decision highlighted a trend of judgments' moderation - as a result of joint discussion – an alignment to their average. Under group conditions, on a pre-decisional stage (step that prepares the decision itself), there is an exchange of information, opinions, arguments, the result of all these interactions is the phenomenon of „normalization” social judgments expressed by convergence to medium effect dc exchange of views. S. Moscovici (1985) proposes an explanation of this phenomenon in terms of influence processes taking place within the group. It starts from the idea that the influence is rooted in a conflict, and seeks consensus.

The groups are heterogeneous by definition: the participants are animated by special interests, each of them convey information and different opinions and ally to different values. All these differences translate discrepancies opposition between „agree” and „disagree” to the group. External conflict between an individual and the other is translated internally by a voltage that is required to be reduced by resolving the disagreement. Consequently, here comes the tendency toward alignment with an average of individual judgments or to a common time for unity amid peer pressure. The conflict - underlines S. Moscovici - which is resolved by convergence to medium aligning the opinion of the majority or by joining the firm position taken by a minority, and it becomes a source of moderation individual judgments and opinions.

## **3. The phenomenon of group polarization**


Classical approaches on group dynamics have shown that if in situations involving problem solving, the group proves to be more efficient in terms of quality and quantity than separate individuals [Steiner, 1972; Hill, 1982], in situations that require collective decision making groups not necessarily make better decisions. Studies have indicated that groups are vulnerable to „forces” that can mistakenly special social decision making. Such a phenomenon is the group's extreme polarization, a trend that appears to involve different from the situation that generates convergence towards the average judgments as a result of joint discussions. The concept of group polarization phenomenon refers to the group's answers tend to become more extreme, moving in the same direction as the average individual responses before discussion group [Myers & Lamm, 1976 and 1978].

## **4. Moving to the risk of collective decision - particular case of group polarization**

In 1961, J. Stoner notes that decisions of the group are often more risky than individual opinions held by members of collective discussion before. This phenomenon called „risky shift” has aroused considerable interest because it appears to contradict the popular belief that conservative groups are relatively „slow” in making decisions. First research on the subject of group discussions aimed at intervening in the „dilemma of choosing”.

The group members were faced with recommending an imaginary person, called to decide between two alternatives, how to proceed. Generally one of the alternatives was considered risky, but with a very desirable outcome, while the other alternative was safe, but assumed a moderate positive result. It was found that subjects were more prone to taking risky decisions after group discussion than it previously. A number of other researches by other authors [N. A. Kogan & Wallach, 1967; H. J. Kelley & Thibaut, 1969] confirmed the tendency or movement towards the thorn risk collective decision. The group therefore proves more „daring” than the individual, knowing from experience that collective bets

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are often riskier than individual ones. Myers & Aronson (1972) showed that group discussion, conducted in order to decide, not always lead to a shift towards riskier alternatives, but may cause an increase in extremities towards initial opinions. In other words, the phenomenon is polarization rather than one of the group's shifts toward risk. Moving or inflection to risk of collective decision is therefore a special case of group polarization.

### **5. Explanatory theories of the phenomenon of group polarization**

There were offered several fundamental explanations for the phenomenon of group polarization [Lamm & Myers, 1976; Isenberg, 1986]. Each of these explanatory paradigms have noticed the appearance of complex group dynamics, the collective situation becomes a potential source of activating, mobilizing energy, phenomena of contagion and social influence, etc. The explanations offered are only partial: we cannot say what the explanation is adequate, but all have a role in producing the phenomenon in varying degrees of intensity.

#### *5.1. Perspective of persuasive arguments*

According to this explanation, the group debated each problem has a common pool of knowledge and information necessary to solve them. It is likely that, in quantitative terms, the knowledge necessary to make certain decisions to be unevenly distributed within the group. Therefore we can distinguish three situations:

- a. All members of the group have the same knowledge, although under uncertainty, these are not all the information required for decision.
- b. A group member has at least as many as all other knowledge to a situation in which a person in the group has a very rich experience in the subject matter of group decision.
- c. Members of the group have different knowledge, so the amount of knowledge group is greater than the knowledge by any of its members.

In this case, each group member has some information that others do not possess. The diversity of situations associated with complex problems likely make individual experiences and knowledge derived therefrom are highly diversified, each subject based on his own knowledge different to some extent from others, tending to see things differently, without being able at often give another person a privileged position of knowledge. As a result, knowledge, information, opinions that will encourage each member has its original orientation.

In group discussions, participants are more likely to argue in favor of his initial attitude, determining their distribution among all group members. The circuit of a group is one in each gives and receives, is simultaneously a source of information and arguments, but also their beneficiary. Therefore, every participant wins new information in its favor as a result of obedience „pros” and „cons” of others [Bumstein & Vinokur, 1977]. Most persuasive arguments made in support of a position, increase the likelihood of its adoption by others, resulting polarization of attitudes.

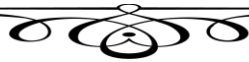
In conclusion, the more and more persuasive arguments in support of a position, the more increase the likelihood of adoption by members of the group for discussion and decision. However, in group discussions are not examined, usually all possible arguments „for” and „against” nor are given all possible alternatives with an equal degree of conviction [Stasser & Titus, 1985].

Often, most of the arguments presented tend to support the initial positions of the participants, so that each of them listen and expose usually more arguments in favor than against their own opinions. Group discussions can make but the participants to think about various alternatives and engage more actively in support of particular positions. Information presented during the discussion may increase participants' conviction – having obviously a persuasive effect – regarding the accuracy of initial opinions, attitudes, leading to the extremities of attitudes and, consequently, to the polarization of the group's decisions.

#### *5.2. Social comparison perspective: regulatory explanation of self-presentation processes*

It starts from the premise that members of a group are concerned about how their opinions are compared with the other members of the group [Goethzb & Darley, 1987]. Other authors emphasize that, during group discussions, they notice that others may have similar attitudes, and that some may express opinions stronger and more extreme than theirs [Lamm & Myers, 1976]. Many of us want to be appreciated much more favorable than what we perceive to be the average trend [Fromkin, 1970].

The desire to be appreciated in a more positive manner than the group average, it may push individuals to a shift towards more extreme positions than those of partners for discussion. When group



members being in communication relationships find themselves in social comparison processes, the result is reflected by a change in the direction of the prevailing attitude. Several experimental studies have supported an integrative perspective – Explanatory on the phenomenon of polarization of group decision, suggesting that both processes – persuasion and social comparison – occur simultaneously [Isenberg, 1986].

### 5.3. *Social identity perspective*

It proposes an explanation in terms of identity and social identification, the group being conceptualized as „a collection of people who have internalized the same identity as a component of self-image” [J. Turner, 1981; J. Eiser, 1986]. Taking as its starting point the individual in the group, social identity is seen as a cognitive structure that regulates social behavior. Peer pressure leads individuals to change their opinions in compliance with the rules in the groups perceived. As a result, they will comply with them what I think is the group's position by changing their attitudes towards one extreme or another.

## 6. **Explanatory theories of the phenomenon of displacement of the decision to risk group**

As mentioned above, the risk inflection collective decision to designate a series of changes that occur in its decision making group, the more moderate decisions by decisions involving a increased risk. Observing that, in solving problems, the groups often take decisions more risky than individuals would solve the same problem, but separately, have proposed three explanations.

### 6.1. *Diffusion of responsibility*

It highlights that decision group members tend to be more moderate than in taking decisions with elevated risk because they have faith that the potential negative consequences of decisions will be responsible for all group members. As a result, each individual will feel less guilty for the consequences of collective decision, each of them being awarded to a certain share and not overall responsibility for group decision [Wallach, Kogan & Ben, 1964].

Cons: it was found that the effect of diffusion of responsibility has not occurred in the context of the subjects were faced with hypothetical situations decision were felt equally more responsible for the results that would have occurred had consecutive group decision.

### 6.2. *Theory of persuasion and leadership*

Assume that individuals who took risky decisions initially tend to become more persuasive and influential within the group, being able to transform, de facto leaders of the group [Collins & Guetzkow, 1964; Vinkur & Bumstein, 1974].

They can exert a disproportionate influence in the group, prompting the other members for taking decisions with increased levels of risk. A variation of this theory states that people who argue in support of risky positions are more confident in their position, thereby becoming a powerful source of influence in the group.

### 6.3. *Risk cultural values of group polarization*

To explain group polarization, there are invoked some cultural values. For example, American society valorizes in a largely risk than the European pledging to assume its default, even if moderate „risk rhetoric” being stronger than me „rhetoric prudence”.

## 7. **Experimental Study**

The experimental study conducted to highlight and measure the phenomenon of group polarization is in fact replicate the experimental research carried out by Doi and Moscovici (1984) on the same theme. The research hypothesis is to demonstrate that depending on the degree of involvement of subjects in group decision making has been a polarization of opinions and judgments post-decisive individual in relation to previous individual opinions and judgments of the group formation.

Where involvement of participants in discussion and group decision is increased, there is a change of opinions and judgments of individual post-decisive by moving them towards the extremes of the spectrum of views and judgments Pre-decisional. If not, the level of personal involvement of participants in discussing and solving collective problems is a low post-decisive phase opinions and judgments revolve around individual average values observed during pre-group phase.

It used a classic experimental paradigm that includes three successive stages:

#### a. Pre-group Phase:

Respondents are presented describing a hypothetical situation, after assessing that each of them separately express their views / positions opposite problem concerned.

#### b. Group Phase:



Subjects were randomly gathered in groups of 4 people being called for group discussions to carry out an assessment of the problem and finally take a collective decision. At this stage, collective discussion is to focus participants on a joint judgments or opinions. Through communication, conflicts between „agree” and „disagree” in the discussion group in the existence of the conflict, which is required to be solved by reducing the disagreement between the different positions of the participants and the need to achieve group consensus.

c. Post-group Phase:

Consecutive group communication completed by adopting a decision, subjects are asked to express a second time and in a separate opinion / their position on the issue discussed. Regarding the material used subjects were presented a scenario consisting of describing a hypothetical situation. Discussed the issue presents a number of 5 options / alternatives ranked by probability of success / failure, which are expressed as a percentage and must choose between the subjects.

The probability of success is an indicator for the riskiness of choice because a minimal probability of success means a maximum of subjective risk-taking, while increasing the probability of success less likely involve risk. Experimental manipulation was done in terms of the degree of involvement in group discussion and collective decision. Achieved a high degree of involvement her subjects to discuss the group and finally decide on the position of career („friends”), degree of involvement in the settlement proposed increasing the intervention of self-characterization mechanisms („group friends”) and activation of social representations about „the friendship”.

If the control group, subjects are engaged in collective discussion and resolution of a problem in a somewhat „impersonal”, which makes the level of subjective involvement to be low. As regards data processing, they were compared:

- post-group results achieved in stages and pre-group experimental group and control group to conclude collective discussion on changes in products;
- post-group stage results in the experimental group and the control group to observe the changes of manipulated experimental factor.

In both cases using sample significance difference between mean checking chance null hypothesis based on the criterion  $|t|$ .

Interpretation of results:

a) Between the average individual opinions expressed by the subjects and media stage pre-group individual opinions, post-group significant differences in the degree of involvement is increased. The strongest subjects are engaged in processes of communication and decision making, the more increases the conflict between the positions expressed, resulting in a bias towards the extremes of the spectrum individual opinions and judgments post-decisive ( $|t| = 2.37$  a threshold of significance  $p < 0.02$ ). The low degree of involvement mild conflicting opinions and judgments between intra-group not leading anymore to polarize opinions ( $|t| = 0$ , III – insignificant for the control group).

b) Also, between the average individual positions expressed by the subjects in the experimental group and the control group there are significant differences. If the experimental group, consecutive debate – the decision to group opinions and judgments of individual polarizing strong degree of commitment and conflict is increased in the control group level of involvement decreased and the need to reduce the disagreement between the participants will highlight the convergence to medium positions and judgments of individual post-group as a result of the exchange of views ( $|t| = 2.382$  at a significance threshold  $p = 0.034 < 0.05$  – significant).

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