

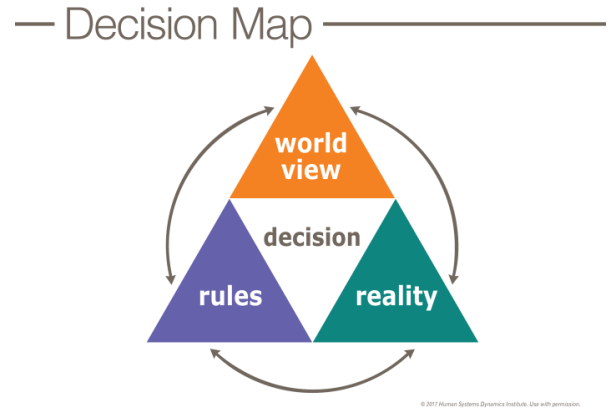


HUMAN SYSTEMS  
DYNAMICS INSTITUTE

## Decision Map

### Description of Decision Map

The Decision Map is a representation of the factors and considerations that influence decisions. Whether you are trying to understand someone else's decisions or consider your own, the Decision Map provides meaningful insights to inform your perspective and action.



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## What?

Use the Decision Map to help you understand considerations that influence decisions. Explore the World View that forms the foundation of a decision. Identify the Rules, regulations, and expectations that shape the decision. Clarify the Reality or evidence you have that supports and informs the decision.

## So What?

Whether you face your next important decision or want to understand someone else's decision, the Decision Map offers three questions to ask about the dynamics that shape that decision. "World view" invites you to consider the impact of the perspectives, values, experiences, and beliefs that drive the decision. Second, if you understand the Rules that bound the decision, they be documented and codified, issues as regulations or authorizations, or expressed in agreements or expectations. Finally, the Decision Map asks you to consider the Reality that informs any decision. That Reality is the context for a decision and reflects perceived conditions, explicit data and information, or a combination of those. Insights into the Reality of a decision informs your action to support or detract from that decision.

Nothing is intractable.

## Now What?

If you understand the Decision Map, you are better able to explore the multiple sides of a question and make the decision that is most fit for function. You can use the Decision Map to inform your work to:

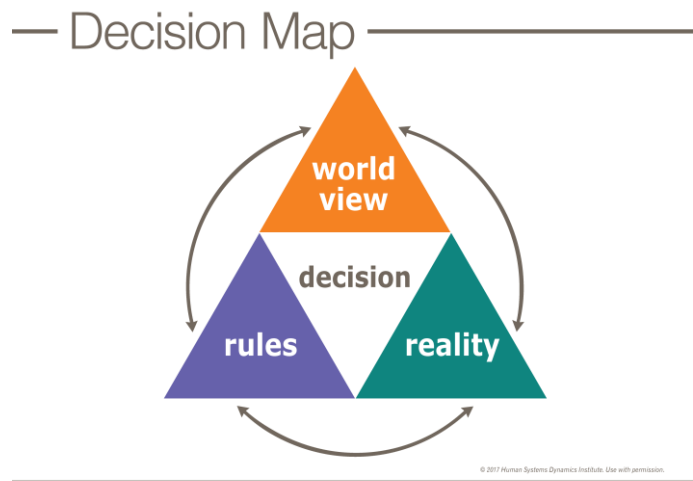
- ▶ Address complex issues across your organization
  - ▷ Support staff and Board members through mergers
  - ▷ Change the culture to support patterns of resilience and innovation
- ▶ Facilitate collaborative planning and decision making
  - ▷ Build coalitions across organizational or political divisions
  - ▷ Create adaptive plans for systemic organizational change
- ▶ Understand and influence patterns of performance
  - ▷ Examine and shift patterns of employee engagement
  - ▷ Plan for effective meetings that engage diverse participants
- ▶ Resolve conflicts among individuals or groups
  - ▷ Help individuals understand how their own perceptions contribute to conflict
  - ▷ Engage groups in open dialogue about leveraging their differences for the good of the group
- ▶ Learn from the past to influence your own patterns and decisions
  - ▷ Explore assumptions that have influenced your decisions in the past
  - ▷ Gain insight into the Rules and expectations that drive your decisions



## Decision Map

### What is the Purpose of the Decision Map?<sup>1</sup>

Decision making is a dynamical process—unknown and immeasurable forces have unpredictable influences on emergent outcomes. The Decision Map simplifies the complexity of decision making by pointing to the range of forces that are at play in any decision. There is no way to know how or to what degree the World View, Reality, and/or Rules influence any given decision, but that is not the point of the Decision Map. Its purpose is to support decision makers in unbraiding complex threads of influence on a decision, so they might find options for action they had not previously considered.



The Decision Map explores three threads of decision making.

- ▶ **World View** describes the perspective of the decision maker(s). The World View colors the decision, based on values, beliefs, and drives. For groups, World View emerges from the shared experiences, vision and goals, and values of the members.
- ▶ **Rules** describe the set of expectations—spoken or understood—that govern the work and activities related to the decision to be made. They may include regulations, formal Rules, and laws. At the same time, informal expectations or social norms can serve as Rules that influence a decision.
- ▶ **Reality** speaks to the evidence or resources available to the decision makers. What do they see? What can they obtain? What is “real” for them in making this decision?

<sup>1</sup> Eoyang, G and Holladay, R. (2013) *Adaptive Action: Leveraging Complexity in Your Organization*. Stanford University Press. pp. 78-83.

Consider a ship's navigation as a metaphor to understand the relationship among the threads of the Decision Map. A sailor's **World View** involves beliefs about the nature of water, wind, tides, stars, machinery, and locomotion, as well as her own relation to each of those. This sailor uses **Rules** she knows about sailing to guide her navigation, e.g., how she operates the ship's engines, conventions for encountering other ships, signaling intentions, hailing other ships. **Reality** consists of the specific circumstances that sailor might find herself in—the individuals she is with, the wind speed, type of weather, water temperature, the ship she is on. The navigational decisions—her actual behavior—involves all three, World View, Reality, and Rules. Each day every person navigates his or her own world by making decisions against the backdrop of his or her own World View, Reality, and Rules.<sup>2</sup>

The Decision Map represents these three components of decision making and their dynamical relationships to each other. It reflects the three factors that contribute to any decision process and explores their interdependence. Decisions emerge from the on-going interaction of all three.

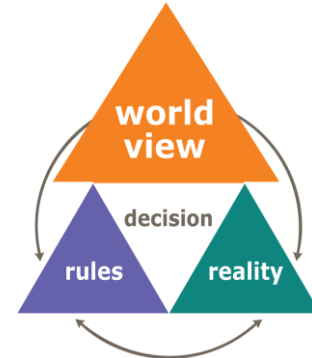
## So What Does the Decision Map Offer You?

The Decision Map is a versatile, robust tool that offers insight at all levels of a system. Its applications help increase coherence at the individual, group, or collective level by clarifying and aligning World View, Reality, and Rules. In any decision, ideally, the three corners of the Decision Map should be relatively balanced, forming an approximate equilateral triangle. Difficulties arise in decision making when one corner begins to overpower the other two.

### *Too much World View*

When those involved in decisions allow their personal World Views influence decisions, the result will not serve greater system. This happens when decision makers act on self-interests or limited perspectives. They make choices based on self-focused reasons. When this happens, Rules get broken--unethical practices emerge, regulations lose meaning, and social expectations shift. When there is too much World View, Reality gets ignored—timelines begin to slide, budgets get overrun, or resources are wasted. Too often this behavior can result in unintended consequences and disastrous outcomes.

When World View dominates . . .



<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Lois Yellowthunder, HSD Associate for sharing this metaphor.

Balancing World View requires that you discuss motives and how such a decision impacts the part as well as the whole. Watch for unethical practices or unintended ways the Rules are ignored or slighted. Help the decision makers attend to the Reality of the context and make sure their actions match what is needed. Build relationships that rely on transparency and authenticity in decision making.

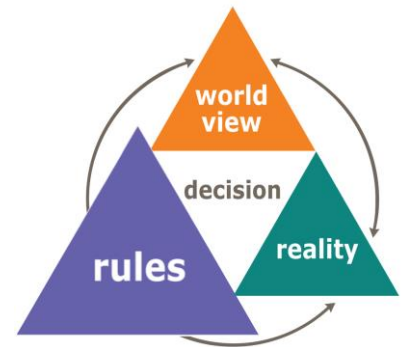
### ***Too much Rules***

When the Rules receive too much focus, World Views are ignored, and people are forced into situations that may violate their own best interests or values. When Reality is subjugated to Rules, the loss or misuse of resources is highly likely. Either way, such a decision cannot be good for the whole system.

If Rules become over emphasized, call decision makers back to the original purposes or the system's best interests. Watch for appropriate or most fit use of resources. Build relationships on clear expectations and shared accountability for staying within those boundaries.

Sometimes it may be necessary to renegotiate, ignore, or break Rules, if the current ones do not accommodate the World View or Reality.

When Rules dominate . . .

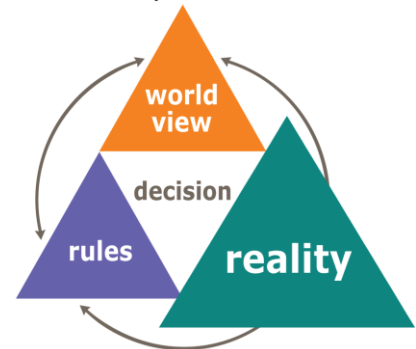


### ***Too much Reality***

When the focus in a decision is too strongly centered around available data and information, too little attention gets paid to the personal needs of the individuals and World Views get too little attention. When Reality is overplayed, Rules and expectations get ignored and accountability fails. The results can be damaged relationships and loss of reputation for an individual or for an organization.

When you realize that this is happening, it's important to step back and reconsider the purpose for the decision and the boundaries that are important. Build relationships on a respect for the Reality, in the context of the whole, rather than as the end, itself.

When Reality dominates . . .



## **Now What Can You Do When You Understand the Map?**

The Decision Map is a robust model that can be used in myriad ways to understand and make decisions that are most fit for function.

Nothing is intractable.

## ***Address complex issues across your organization.***

Leaders need to understand the systems where they work. Using the Decision Map at the organizational level provides insights about how a system operates in its environment. Leaders gather information to help them understand the Decision Map of the whole organization. They observe behavior across the organization, review past decisions, interview individuals at all levels inside the organization, as well as those in the customer base and vendor pool.

Once the current Map is articulated, the leader begins to identify changes that need to be made. The following questions might help leaders “see” their organizations in more specific ways.

- ▶ Is the Decision Map coherent throughout the organization? Do middle managers make decisions in the same way top management does? Do the line workers share the common Decision Map?
- ▶ What is the mental model of the total system and does it serve to move the organization toward its stated goals?
- ▶ How does the Decision Map of the internal workers align with the Decision Maps of the clients/customers? How does it align with the Decision Map of the vendors?
- ▶ What data do we use? What other data might inform our decisions more accurately?

This depth of understanding helps leaders make choices about influencing or shifting any part of the organization’s Map. The World View of the organization can be shifted through activities, such as branding, intensive communications strategies, and ongoing reinforcement of changes the leader wants to see.

## ***Facilitate collaborative planning and decision making***

Members of work groups use the Decision Map to understand their work together in much the same way it is used at the organizational level.

- ▶ Articulate an agreed-upon Decision Map to guide their work together
- ▶ Use the organizational Decision Map, clarifying for their own purposes how they each interpret and apply it in their work together
- ▶ Work to understand the Decision Map of their customers/clients to more clearly align their products and services to external needs
- ▶ Create and agree on a set of Simple Rules to guide coherent decision making and action

## ***Understand/Influence Patterns of Performance***

Patterns of performance or behavior are established as individuals absorb, organize, interpret, and communicate information and other resources. These activities are influenced by the Decision Maps of the individuals who shape the patterns. By understanding the Decision Map of a given pattern, leaders can damp or amplify that pattern by addressing the components of the Decision Map. To gain greater understanding the about pattern, use open-ended questions.

- ▶ How might the experiences, values of this individual or group shape the decisions they are making?
- ▶ What can I learn about the World View of this individual or group from looking at the patterns of decisions they make?
- ▶ What Rules, regulations, or expectations might be shaping the decisions I am exploring?
- ▶ What can I deduce about what is important to this individual or group, based on the Rules that seem to shape decisions?
- ▶ What evidence or data was used in making this decision, and what can I learn from exploring this question?

The most effective exploration of this sort happens when those who are involved and those who are affected engage in open dialogue that explore these questions.

## ***Facilitate collaborative planning and decision making***

This tool can be used to facilitate decision making for groups or for an individual. In either case, the process would be similar.

Make certain that the participants first understand the meaning associated with each corner of the map. If they are not sure of the meaning, use examples and discussion to help them gain that understanding before applying it in their situation. You may even want to re-name the corners to use the language of the group. For example, one group might talk about Assumptions, Evidence-Based Practices, and Context. Another might consider Culture, Expectations, and Observations. As long as the three corners focus on patterns that are similar to World View, Rules, and Reality, the language will not matter.

Ask each participant to reflect on his/her own World View, Reality, and Rules around the decision in question and about possible outcomes and their impact on the work to be done. Questions they could ask themselves include the following.

- ▶ What are my personal beliefs?
- ▶ How do I feel about this decision and its outcomes?

**Nothing is intractable.**

- ▶ What Rules are important here?
- ▶ What written regulations or policies apply?
- ▶ What are my own Simple Rules or values that apply?
- ▶ What would be socially acceptable or appropriate here?
- ▶ What exists in the Reality of this situation?
- ▶ Is there some evidence or context I might be missing?
- ▶ How can I gather further facts and/or data?

Once they have had a few minutes for reflection, the facilitator may take the conversation in one of a couple of directions.

- ▶ Go around the room in order or invite random responses. Ask people to share what they want to about their own maps. Make it explicit that they don't have to share if their reflections are too personal, but ask them to share whatever they can that might have an impact on the decision. Then move on to discuss the question to be decided.
- ▶ Move directly into the discussion, asking participants to keep their own Decision Maps in mind as they engage in the conversation. Facilitate discussion by pointing out when there appears to be a difference among participants concerning one or more corners. Help them to negotiate those differences and move toward a resolution.
- ▶ Work together, as a group, to define World View, Rules, and Reality that are common to everyone. Then, use that as a foundation for making decisions or negotiating differences.

### ***Resolve conflicts among individuals and groups***

The Decision Map can be used to help individuals or groups resolve conflicts by helping them articulate their own World View, Rules, and Reality. Through this sharing, individuals come to understand their conflict more deeply. Do they have conflicting World Views? Do they see Reality differently? Are their Rules in conflict? Using this tool can help them find ways to negotiate their differences.

Ask each participant to reflect on his/her own World View, Reality, and Rules around the decision in question and about possible outcomes and their impact on the work to be done. Use specific questions that have them focus on each corner of the map.

Then engage the group in shared inquiry about the similarities and differences among members of the group. Consider where there are points that can be negotiated as you amplify the similarities and navigate the differences.

**Nothing is intractable.**



## ***Learn from the past to influence your own patterns***

Strong leaders take the time to reflect on and learn from their past actions. Both successes and failures have a great deal to teach, and one way of framing the lessons is through the application of the Decision Map.

## **Now What Can You Do, Using a Decision Map?**

When you can reflect on and understand decisions through the lens of the Decision Map, you can better understand both the origins and impacts of those decisions. You learn how ignoring or diminishing the Decision Map can impede effective decision making. Additionally, through reflection, you can become more aware of how, in the future, to consider all three corners of the Decision Map and make more balanced decisions for the systems in which you live and work.