

Understanding Non-Decision Making

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INTRODUCTION

Non-decision making (NDM) has received limited attention in the research literature. However, this is surprising bearing in mind that the concept of NDM (the impact of the mobilisation of bias upon a latent issue) can indeed be observed and analysed (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963). Notwithstanding this, there is a considerable volume of research literature focusing on power relations and the impact of these relations on group or community decision-making. These research studies have relevance based on the fact that the concept of NDM has emerged through attempts to theorise power relations in society (Kamuzora, 2006). This entry presents some of the important aspects of what has been researched with regards to power relations and the emergence of the concept of Non-Decision Making.

BACKGROUND

There are many conflicting and contrasting theoretical perspectives existing to explain power relations in various societal contexts and these perspectives form the roots of the concept of NDM. Three contrasting theoretical perspectives feature in explaining power relations, namely: pluralist, elitist, and structuralist (Kamuzora, 2006).

The elitist perspective challenges the pluralist perspective on power relations suggesting that power is concentrated in the hands of “unrepresentative groups working in collaboration to confine the agenda and limit the area of public participation” (Kamuzora, 2006, p. 65). In fact, (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962) suggested that power can constrict decision-making through manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures. Furthermore, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) contend that power is not simply about controlling observable behaviour and decisions but also exists in a nonobservable form, namely: Non-Decision Making. Ultimately, this gets reflected in “involuntary failure to act and deliberate

decisions not to act” or “what is not being done” (Kamuzora, 2006).

For the purposes of this short encyclopedia entry, it is the elitist theoretical perspective on power relations that is embraced in introducing this notion of NDM.

MAIN FOCUS

NDM has been referred to as the second face of power (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962) and it is not visible to the naked eye (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963). Indeed, these less visible forms (hidden art form) of NDM which are difficult to detect, comprehend, and communicate to others have been referred to as category manipulation (Judge, 1997). In fact, Bachrach and Baratz (1963, p. 632) appraised the distinct concepts of power, force, influence, and authority, associated with NDM, as illustrated in Table 1.

As a result, NDM can be defined as “the practice of limiting the scope of actual decision-making to ‘state’ issues by manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures” (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963). Using this definition we can appreciate that NDM exists when the dominant values of the most powerful members of a group or community forcefully and effectively manipulate the situation in order to prevent certain grievances from developing into full-fledged issues which call for decisions.

With regard to power, it is important to understand that while certain conditions are necessary (for example: a conflict of interest or values between person A and person B) these conditions may not in fact be sufficient conditions of power. Indeed, Bachrach and Baratz (1963) argued that there were several elements of their conception of power, in that a power relationship exists if there is a conflict of interest regarding a course of action between person A and person B, and B complies with the wishes of A, as B is fearful of the threat of sanctions from A which will deprive B of values that would not have been achieved by noncompliance. Indeed, Bachrach and Baratz (1963)

Table 1. Distinct concepts associated with NDM (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963)

Property	Description
Power	It has been argued that power like wealth is a possession which benefits the owner. However, the opposite has also been argued that power or the instruments of power cannot be possessed because “one cannot have power in a vacuum, but only in relation to someone else,” and “the successful exercise of power is dependent upon the relative importance of conflicting values in the mind of the recipient in the power relationship.” (p. 633)
Force	It has been argued that force is power exercised. However, alternative perspectives have been offered where the concepts of power and force are differentiated. For example, in a power relationship, one party obtains another’s compliance, while in a situation involving force, the choice between compliance and noncompliance to the course of action is stripped from one party and the other party’s objectives must be achieved, often through manipulation.
Influence	The line of distinction between power and influence is often blurred. However, while both concepts are alike, the distinction between the two should be made. Their difference is as follows: their exercise of power depends on potential sanctions, while the exercise of influence does not. In effect the two concepts of power and influence are often mutually reinforcing, that is, power frequently generates influence and vice versa.
Authority	It has been argued that authority can be defined as “formal power” and that it is closely related to power. However, an alternative meaning of authority suggests that the concept can be defined as “a quality of communication” that possesses “the potentiality of reasoned elaboration.” Like power, authority can be regarded as a relational concept. It is not that person A possesses authority but that person B regards A’s communication as authoritative.

argued that under the duress of force a person’s scope for decision-making is radically curtailed. Therefore, compliance or noncompliance to a course of action is not an option, as force will be exercised, in any case, to manipulate the situation.

Various Forms of Category Manipulation

It has been observed that manipulation is a key component of NDM and has been described as a subconcept of force and distinguished from power, influence, and authority (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963). Parents make extensive use of NDM processes (especially manipulation) in persuading children to act, or not act, in particular ways, while sales personnel make use of these skills in dealing with customers or in handling product complaints—as do confidence tricksters (Judge, 1997). Table 2 presents an extensive list of categories of manipulation which are used by dominant actors in a community.

Sammon (2004) studied the relationships between actors in the enterprise resource Planning (ERP) Community, highlighting the impact of NDM, through identifying these various forms of category manipulation (Table 2), in the context of relationships and interactions observed between the ERP Community actors, namely: the implementing organisation, the ERP vendor, and the ERP consultant.

Example of Non-Decision Making in an ERP Community

Sammon (2004) presented the interactions between the actors in an ERP Community, underlying their relationships during the software selection decision-making process, as illustrated in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the diffusion of an ERP package (innovation) arises from the confluence of three sets of factors, namely: substantive, institutional, and political. An explanation for each of these three factors is provided in Table 3. As argued by Wood and Caldas (2001), all of these factors interact with each other, creating a complex dynamic process and influencing

- The adoption.
- The implementation approach.
- The assessment of ERP systems in organisations.

Sammon (2004) described how the institutional factors influenced and shaped the political factors (those that emerge in the implementing organisation) by encouraging the emergence of the substantive factors (the accepted and publicised drivers and enablers of the ERP concept). In the case of the ERP package selection initiative, political factors within the internal environment of the parent organisation (DOELG) were

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