

Title: It Just Feels Right: The Intuitive Mind and Decision Making

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Abstract:

The introduction to the Handbook of Decision Making (Nutt & Wilson, 2010) calls for managers “to choose wisely in order to benefit both the organisation and its key stakeholders” (p. 3). Yet within the 679 pages of the Handbook of Decision Making, wisdom is only mentioned once. However, this oversight of wisdom is not uncommon, as *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Decision Making* (Hodgkinson & Starbuck, 2008) makes no mention of wisdom whatsoever. However, there is increasing acknowledgement that rational decision-making models are not adequate for complex social systems (Hodgkinson & Starbuck, 2008; Nutt & Wilson, 2010; Stacey, 2011). As a result, there is growing interest in the role of intuition within decision making (Malewska, 2015a; Weber & Lindemann, 2011). There are conflicting interpretations and descriptions of intuition. Intuition has been described as “a paranormal force,” “a sixth sense,” (Malewska, 2015b) “premonitions,” “unbidden hunches” and “gut reactions” (Myers, 2002). Conversely, intuition is also described as a rational process, where the input into the process is generally provided by knowledge or experiences stored in the long-term memory and processed automatically in the subconscious (Betsch, 2008; Malewska, 2015b; Sadler-Smith, 2010). Similarly, Claxton, Owen, and Sadler-Smith (2015) suggest that intuition exists at the “nexus of cognition and affect” (p. 57). These descriptions of intuition suggest that it is an expertise-based response as opposed to a mystical experience. This research adopted a qualitative research methodology and paradigmatic case study methods (Flyvbjerg, 2011) to investigate decision making and the use of intuition within the hospitality environment. Data collection methods included in-depth semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Neuman, 2014). Data analysis involved inductive and abductive reasoning to guide and inform ongoing interpretation and examine divergence within the data (Patton, 2002). The finding revealed that intuition is an important contributor to the decision-making process by many of the participants as it informed interpersonal interactions and also provided relevant and sometimes compelling information. While the participants used terms like instinct, gut and emotions to describe intuitive processes, it is apparent that the participants’ intuition was generally associated with values, feelings and tacit knowledge gained from experience. The value placed on intuition by the participants and their acceptance of it as a valid form of information challenges the dominance of rational decision-making strategies (e.g. Beshears & Gino, 2015) which, as Sadler-Smith (2010) suggests, regard the use of intuition as undesirable and to be avoided if possible. Instead, intuition is identified as a key source of information within this study. It is developed over time, which requires practice in listening to and interpreting feelings, exercising values, and accumulating tacit knowledge. This description is consistent with Cokely and Feltz’s (2014) claim that intuitions are based on past experiences, connections and feelings. However, rather than intuition being mystical, random and irrational,

the findings of this study conceptualise intuition as natural, purposeful and sensible, and in this sense, when mastered it can be described as intelligent intuition.

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