



SOL-UK (London) Workshop

‘Improving the Decision-Taking Process in Institutions’

**Room H705, 7th Floor, Connaught House, London School of Economics, WC2
Friday, 23rd June 2006 - 1000-1730**

INTRODUCTION

Professor Eve Mitleton-Kelly, Executive Co-ordinator of SOL-UK (London), welcomed all the participants on behalf of SOL-UK (London) to the workshop which was offering a space, an opportunity, acting as a catalyst to generate some insights and to start the process of working together on collaborative projects. A list of participants can be seen at:

<http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-Participants.pdf>

together with a brief biography, reason for attending the workshop and possible contribution to a research project for each participant at: <http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-Participants-info.pdf>

Eve explained that SoL is a global network of learning communities with shared principles and values with a culture of mutuality of openness and trust.

An outline of the broad topic for the day was:

- If decision-making is a learning process, then:
 - o What is the role of language?
 - o How can we understand the process in the brain?
 - o Where does intuition come in?
 - o Can metaphors help?

The four presentations would introduce each topic.

Other aspects to be explored were:

- Improving learning by accelerating the decision making process
- Understanding the role of perceptions in the process
- Exploring the parallels between the learning process of the human brain and the learning process by institutions
- Overcoming corporate denial and developing corporate insight e.g. by better use of an organisation's distributed intelligence
- The role of emotions in management e.g. contrast management by feat and management through cooperation

The intent for the day would be:

**To create a space for multidisciplinary research into:
Learning how to improve and accelerate team decision making in institutions**

The process for this would be four short presentations to address some of the issues, followed by small group work to explore the current challenges in the field and possible research questions for different research projects.

The desired outcomes would be:

- Multidisciplinary research projects that bring together the 3 constituencies of SoL
 - o Practitioners
 - o Consultants
 - o Researchers
- Exploring different types of funding
 - o E.g. through Research Councils
 - o Participating organisations
 - o Other
- Publishing through SOL-UK (London) and Triarchy Press or submission to peer-reviewed journals, etc.
- Creating an enabling environment that facilitates conversations and reflections.

This would hopefully be done by Community Action Research (CAR):

- Learning as a community of practitioners, consultants and researchers
- CAR focuses on:
 - o Fostering relationships and collaboration
 - o Creating settings for collective reflection
 - o Facilitating institutional transformation
- Building cross-organisational learning communities
 - o With a common purpose: e.g. building knowledge for organisational transformation; through advancing theory, tools and practical know-how
 - o Shared principles
 - o Common understanding of the knowledge-creating process
- Through research, capacity-building, practice

Finally, Eve invited participants to introduce others whom they thought might be interested in this initiative and explained that though the project groups would be self-organising, SOL-UK will offer administrative support and advice on setting up projects (if required).

Eve then introduced Nazreen A Subhan who would be the facilitator for the day. Nazreen briefly outlined the programme for the day <http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-Programme.pdf> explaining that the morning would consist of 3 sessions, the first 2 would each have 2 presentations by speakers, with each session being followed by time for question formulation for the speakers by small groups at tables and the third session would provide an opportunity for the speakers to respond to the questions posed by the groups.

SESSION 1

The first speaker was **DR MELISSA LAMAR**, Lecturer in Cognitive Neuroscience & Neuropsychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London.

Dr Lamar holds a Ph.D. in Clinical Neuropsychology and has completed advanced training in Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging as an intramural research fellow within the Cognition Section of the Laboratory of Personality and Cognition at the National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health in the USA. Her research focuses on early markers of cognitive decline in normal and pathological aging with an emphasis on prefrontal cortex and associated executive functions. Through this work, Dr. Lamar has studied the impact of normal aging on decision making from both a cognitive and a neurophysiological perspective.

Dr. Lamar's presentation '***Cognitive Neuroscience of Decision Making & the Role of Learning & Language in this Process***' centered on the cognitive neuroscience of decision making and the role of learning and language in this process. Operational definitions of these variables were discussed as they relate to neuroscientific research and application. Neuroanatomical substrates and cortico-cortical as well as cortico-subcortical connections between brain structures were reviewed as they relate to the decision making process. While biased toward the individual level of analysis, extrapolations to the larger group environment were also discussed. Dr. Lamar's presentation can be seen at:

<http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-Lamar-presentation.pdf>

The next presentation was from **EUGENE SADLER-SMITH**, Professor of Management Development and Director of the Centre for Management Learning and Development (CMLD) at the School of Management, University of Surrey.

Eugene's work is currently focused upon the impact of manager's information processing styles (and in particular intuition) on individual behaviour, learning and performance. For seven years up until 1994 he worked in the human resource development function of a large gas corporation in the UK. He has a first degree from the University of Leeds and a doctorate from the University of Birmingham (1992). He is associate editor for the *International Journal of Management Reviews*, a member of the editorial advisory board of the *British Journal of Management*, and has published research papers in journals such as *Academy of Management Executive*, *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Organization Studies* and *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*. He is author of *Learning and Development for Managers: perspectives from research and practice* (Oxford: Blackwell) and, with Peter J. Smith of *Learning in Organizations: complexities and diversities* (Abingdon: Routledge)

Eugene's presentation was entitled '***Intuition in Management Decision Making***'. Briefly, an intuition may be defined as a confident recognition or judgment that: a) is arrived at rapidly, without deliberative rational thought; b) consists of holistic associations; c) is difficult to articulate verbally; d) is affectively charged (Dane & Pratt, 2006; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005). Even though the conditions under which managers operate may sometimes limit or even preclude the use of rational analysis, it is nevertheless the norm in many organizational decision processes and in the curricula of management schools. Intuition on the other hand is often considered to be the antithesis of this approach and is, on the face of it, sometimes overlooked or disregarded. However, in recent years there has been resurgence of interest in intuition perhaps because of some dissatisfaction with rationality and its limits and also because some psychologists are now arguing that much of cognition occurs automatically outside of consciousness and in the realm of intuition. Knowledge of intuition has made significant advances in recent years and it can now be understood as a composite phenomenon involving interplay between 'knowing' (intuition-as-expertise) and 'sensing' (intuition-as-feeling). Furthermore, rather than being set in opposition to each other, intuition and rationality are perhaps better conceived as two parallel systems of knowing. Against this backdrop this presentation considered the significance of intuition in decision-making processes. Eugene's full presentation can be seen at:

<http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-Sadler-Smith-presentation.pdf>

Following these two presentations participants were asked to take 10 minutes in groups at their tables (5 tabs) to formulate one question for the speakers and to write the question on a flipchart. Below are the questions:

SESSION 1 QUESTIONS:

1. Is there any relationship between group decision making and individual decision making at a neurological level?
2. To what extent is intuition only important in time-pressured situations?
 - Is there a neuroscience take on this question?
3. If the pre-conscious experiential mode is the ‘norm’ in managerial decision-making:
 - What is the impact of increasing time-pressure on decision-making and brain activity?
 - What are the ‘triggers’ for switching to ‘rational mode’ and back again?
4. Are we asking the right question?
 - Assuming the split between mind and body
 - Developing intuitive sense in managers?
 - We use analytic part to review the past – how about the future?
5. What is the process that distinguishes the rational from the intuitive or the familiar from the unfamiliar?

Unshared questions

- How does the conscious & unconscious side interact?
- How do we make decisions when we have no prior?
- Does intuitive not take over rational decision making in reality?
- Why did rational decision making emerge?
- What role did intuitive decision making play in the Gulf War “friendly fire”?
- How can intuition get buy-in from others?
- To what extent is a duality between rationality and intuition a false split?

A 15 minute refreshment break followed.

SESSION 2

The first presentation of this session was given by **OLIVER McADOO**, Head of Critical Thinking at Godalming University.

Oliver McAdoo M.A. (Sussex) is a philosophy lecturer, and teacher in charge of Critical Thinking at a 6th form College. He is currently completing doctoral research in the philosophy of logic and has lectured in both further and higher education. He has organised and chaired conference and training days giving papers on, amongst other things, Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, the Philosophy of Neuroscience and Analytic Philosophy. He is currently senior examiner in philosophy and his introductory book on epistemology was published in January of this year.

Oliver's presentation was entitled '*Language, Thought and Reality*'. Oliver's full presentation can be seen at:

<http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-McAdoo-presentation.pdf>

Oliver has also offered to provide his full PhD dissertation (the first 3 chapters of which formed the basis for his presentation) to those who are interested once it has been completed.

The final presentation '*The Use of Metaphor as a Language Exercise*' was given by **ERIC VAN LOON** and **MICHIEL WILHELM**.

Eric van Loon has a BA, Technical Computer Science, School of Engineering and MSc, General Management, Nyenrode Business University . He is currently employed as project manager for Shell IT International and project lead for several international oriented telecom solutions. His former jobs include manager for NOS (Dutch public broadcasting organization). Eric's professional interests are Organizational Dynamics, complexity and knowledge.

Michiel Wilhelm has a BA, Architectural Design from School of Arts, an MSc, General Management, Nyenrode Business University and is training as a computer programmer. He has worked as an architectural designer and as a computer programmer and is presently employed as a coordinator for a foundation that provides housing and studios for professional artists. His professional interest is in Change Management and Organizational Dynamics, Management of Innovation and Creativity, Complexity Theory.

The subject of their presentation was the use of metaphor as a language exercise. The essence is that by having a group of participants discuss and evaluate images as metaphors, the emergence of a new jargon is facilitated. Through metaphor people come to develop a common language.

The three issues addressed were:

- what is a metaphor?
- what are the implications of the use of metaphor?
- what can metaphors do in a group process?

Concluding remarks were made about a couple of metaphor workshops organized in The Netherlands. Their full presentation can be seen at:

<http://triarchypress.co.uk/pages/pdfs/230606-VanLoon-presentation.pdf>

As in Session I, following these two presentations participants were asked to take 10 minutes in groups at their tables (5 tables) to formulate one question for the speakers and to write the question on a flipchart. Below are the questions:

SESSION 2 QUESTIONS:

1. What's the difference between a concept/expression and a metaphor?
2. Is intuition the non-language part of decision-making?
 - Need to find different ways of understanding holistically – more than scientific analysis.

3. What is the role of “the future” (and of ‘play’/metaphor) in creative realities that do not yet exist?
 - Is there a useful analogy here between the brain and social processes?
4. In the decision making process is metaphor paradoxical in that it helps and hinders?
e.g. ‘New’ Labour or “DeskTop”.
5. What is the relationship between consciousness, thought, reality, language and action? How does it help?

Unasked questions:

- Does intuition need language?
- What is the relationship between language and action?
- Do we need words before things can meaningfully exist for an individual?
- Are there different precisions and levels of abstraction in language?
- Are there levels of consciousness that exist independently of language?
- Are there different types of language such as emotional language that lack words?
- To what extent are metaphors culturally relevant?
- Can metaphors be limiting?

SESSION 3

The speakers, in panel, now had the opportunity to respond to the group’s questions arising from Sessions 1 and 2, and Eve Mitleton-Kelly invited each of the speakers to pick one of the questions.

MELISSA LAMAR said there were several questions about group decision making versus individual decision making and explained that all the neuroscientific data available was from individuals as, terms of group dynamics, it was impossible to put groups into scanners!

She said, however, that group data showed that authority will make people act in a way they would not normally do and cited the group dynamics effect with administering electrical shocks to a subject when a group of people acted against their normal instincts because they were told to do so by an authoritarian figure.

Two interesting points were made:

- Probably more could be learned from examining the neurological patterns of the individuals who did not conform to the group dynamics than examining the conformists
- Are the things that make for good decisions common to all age groups?

EUGENE SADLER-SMITH’s view was that experience was the key factor in decision making, not age. He was asked if there was any evidence of intuition in children and their decision taking and responded that he tended to veer towards the notion of intuition as experience rather than a trait.

Eugene wondered whether the work of skin conductance responses could be extrapolated to the Board Room and to what extent organisations are prepared to trust the gut feeling of an experienced executive. Could we help managers to understand intuition and use this in a constructive way?

Also, he noted that there were 2 aspects of intuition – fast paced and that which developed after a period of reflection.

OLIVER McADOO

In response to a question 'Is intuition the non-language part of decision making', Oliver admitted that he did not know. However, he believes that there is certainly more to language than words. He defined language as 'any shared form of communication which allows us to interact'.

Oliver said that he tended to advocate a contextual rather than holistic/multi-disciplinary approach and though he was not against a neuroscientific approach, he felt that there was a move away from the notion that neuroscience has a monopoly.

MICHIEL WILHELM was asked what the difference was between a concept/expression and a metaphor? His response was that a concept does not exist in thought or speech unless it is a metaphor. He felt that metaphors helped in decision making because there is something about feeling, intuition and emotion which is related to metaphors. He feels that the play state is the desired state and that play is characterised by no rules, whereas games have rules – therefore play is a safe environment.

Eugene Sadler Smith felt that play (simulation) may be a good way of helping managers to develop and understand intuition and that metaphor and play could be a means of loosening the hold on reality.

Eve thanked all the speakers and drew the morning sessions to a close.

Following a 1 hour break for lunch Nazreen outlined the programme for the afternoon i.e. during the first session participants were invited to form their own groups and discuss what research questions might arise from the morning's inputs – these to be written up on a flipchart. Following this, the next session would be more group work to explore what topics arise as research questions and the third session would be group work identifying emergent research projects. The final half hour of the day would be spent discussing next steps and processes.

SESSION 4

In this session participants were requested to form groups (4 tables) to discuss '*What research questions arise from the morning's input?*' and record the outcomes on a flipchart. These are shown below:

Table 1 [Didier's group]

- THEORETICAL
↓
- EMPIRICAL
↓
- PRACTICAL
???

Table 2 [Arie's group]

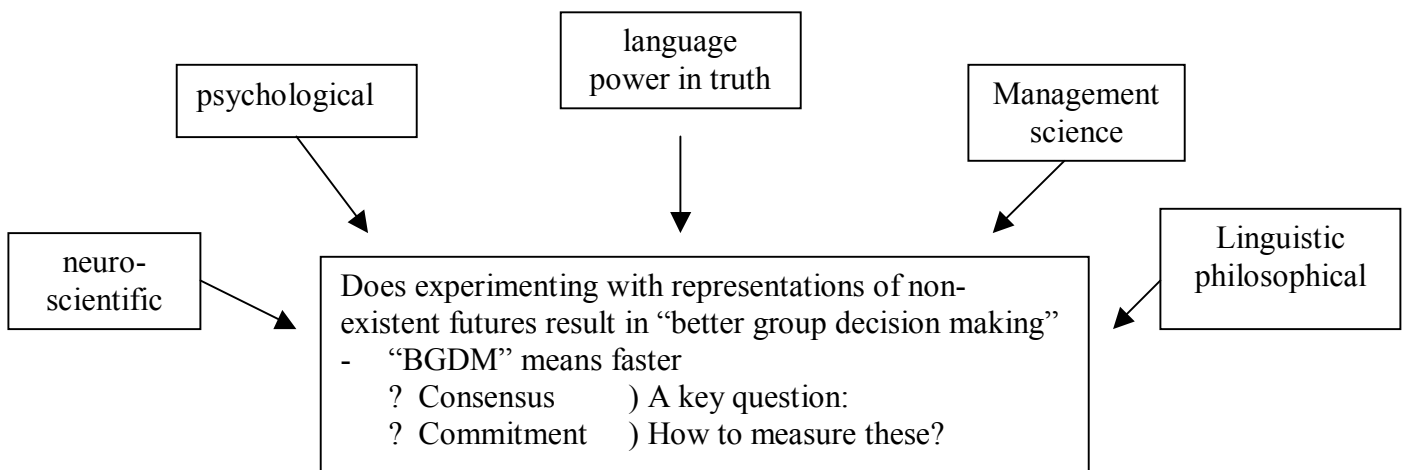


Table 3 [Roy's group]

- What is the role of the need to be liked and how does it influence the outcome of decisions?
- What needs to happen for the sum of the people's decisions to be better than an individual decision taker?
- What do decision takers believe makes good decision making?
- Would engaging decision makers in the research & learning lead to improved decision making?
- Which comes first, intuitive or rational buy in and justification of decisions?
- Is the process of decision making about choosing?
- How many people do you need to make a good decision?
- How could we have improved our decision making today here in the group?
- What assumptions are at play when we use the work 'decision' (e.g. types)?
- What are the characteristics of contextual decision making?
- What is the role of external connections to external systems to the internal decision making process?
- How the internal thinking styles limit/increase the future prospects of the organisation?
- Does the way we reward, promote and communicate limit potential success?
- How can we develop an internal thinking style that increases organisational success?
- How do you assess the quality of a decision a priori?

- How do we improve the decision making processes?
- How do we define the scope of a decision making process?
- Is all decision making intrinsically selfish?
- How often do actors in decision making switch and leave?

Table 4 [Eve's group]

- What value is there in relationships in organisations?
 - When we destroy relationships e.g. outsourcing
 - Creating networks of trust (cost)
 - The link between metaphor and context making within networks
- Creating environments in which people feel free to tell the truth when the instinct is to stay quiet through anxiety to confront hierarchy → environments of fear and subversive management.
- Pattern recognition, decision making and future making → link with SoL's 'presencing'.
- Wicked problems and logical frames and traps
- Reality of decision making – information or intuition
- Value of play/playfulness in organisation decision making
 - Exploring simultaneously multiple micro strategies and management filtering
- Creating new language → creating new realities

Comments & Observations

- Though it was understandable that the speed of decision making could give an organisation an important competitive advantage, it was also felt that the quality of the decision was equally important and it was felt that it would be good to develop other measures of success rather than just speed.
- Another observation was that there seemed to be some slipping away from the role of language and it should be brought back into focus.

SESSION 5

Following a refreshment break, participants were again invited to form groups and ‘*Identify what topics arise as research questions?*’ and in relation to this a) *What do we know?* and b) *What don’t we know?* The outcomes were again recorded on flipcharts below:

Table 1 [Didier’s group]

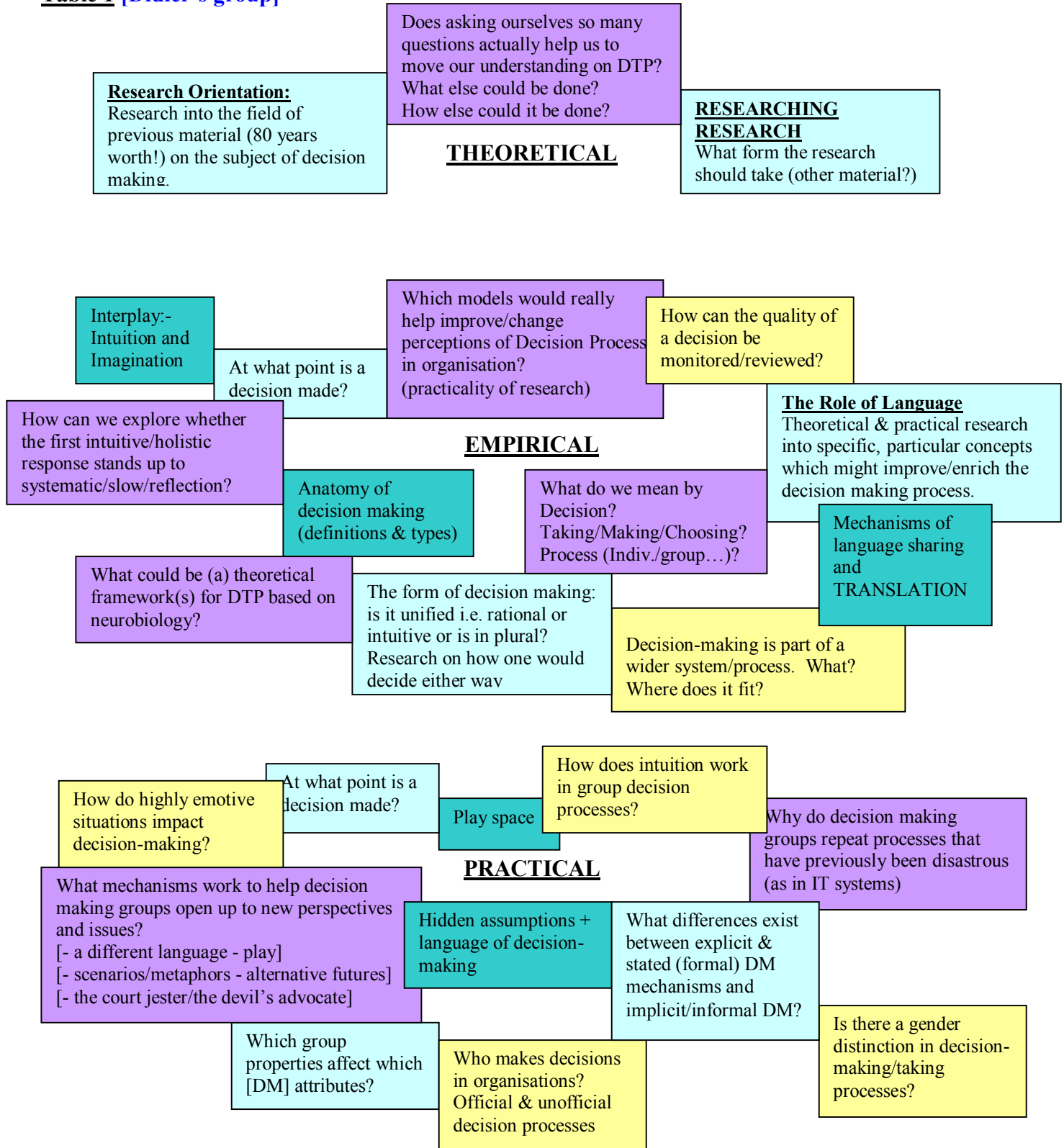


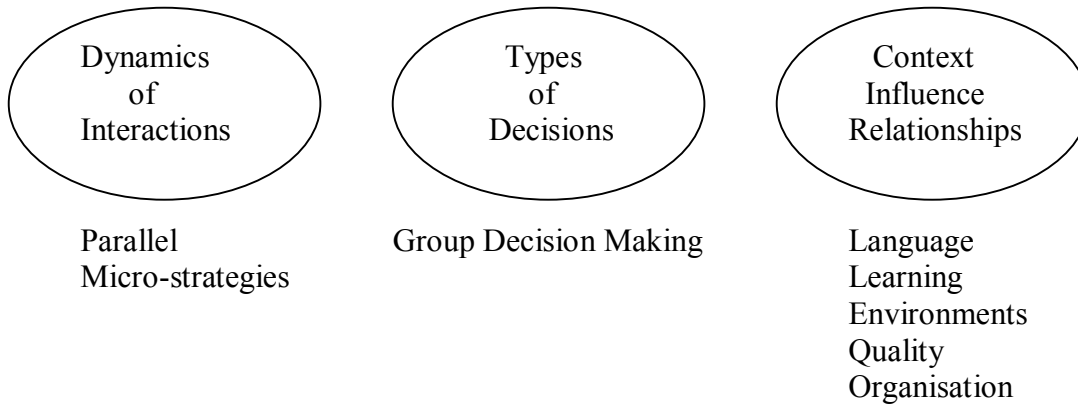
Table 2 [Arie's group]

This group did record their discussions on a flipchart but reported that they started talking about context and it emerged that a definition of decision making processes in institutions was needed.

Table 3 [Roy's group]

- What comprises a skilful decision making process?
- How do successful or different institutions manage the quality of their strategic decision making?
- How do decision makers recognise signals?
- Does the organisational design & structure aid or hinder effective decision making?
- Which institutions are good at making decisions and why? (What do they do right?)
- What is the long term effect of an institution's guiding principles and the way short term decisions are made?
- Is a good manager necessary in a good institution?

Table 4 [Eve's group]



General Comments and Observations

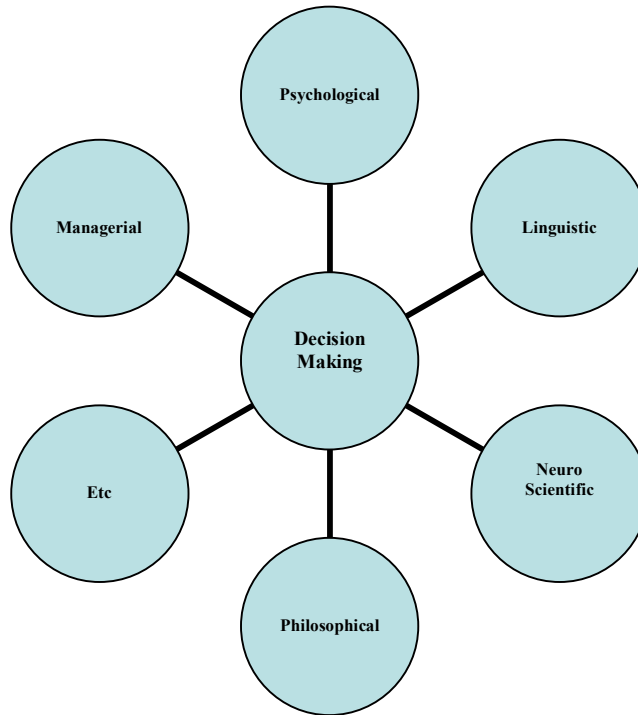
- It was generally felt that all participants stepped back and looked at the bigger picture in this session.
- It was also pointed out that there is a lot of research already done in this/or related areas and it would be a good idea to find out what is already known.
- One concern was that there was too much information available and finding out what is available may delay moving forward
- However, if participants/groups follow up areas they are passionate about this should not hinder progress

SESSION 6

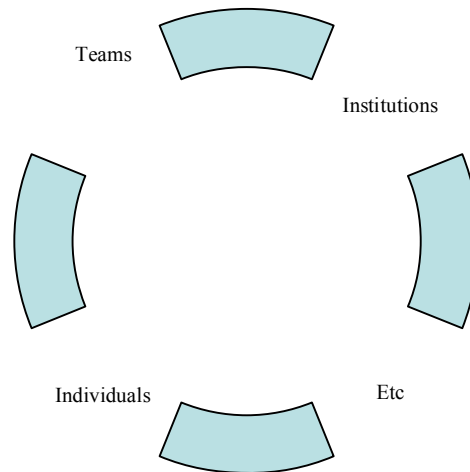
Participants were asked to identify emergent research projects, record these ‘seed ideas’ on flipcharts and those who were interested in a particular idea were requested to ‘sign up’. Below are the responses:

TABLE 2 [Arie’s group]

NEED: Common Definition



1. Collate research/literature from the various areas (intuition, storytelling, play, sense making, metaphor, ...)
2. What is transferable between



3. What triggers such processes?
 - How do these challenge conventional management thinking?/'wisdom'
4. How does the human mind deal with the future?

TABLE 1 [Didier's group]

- What is the anatomy of decision making?

THEORETICAL (Research based)	EMPIRICAL (Experiment based)	PRACTICAL (Experience based)
Participants interested in each aspect		
Oliver McAdoo		
Rosie Beckham		
Didier Clement	Didier Clement	Didier Clement
Graham Robinson	Graham Robinson	Graham Robinson
Susan Williams	Susan Williams	Susan Williams
	Dave Droar	Dave Droar
	Ken Eason	Ken Eason
	Michiel Wilhelm	Michiel Wilhelm

TABLE 3 [Roy's group]

- Do institutions manage the quality of their strategic decision making? Are they playing blind!!!?
Subthemes:
 - What do we mean by strategic decision making and what methods are used? (e.g. intuitive or rational)
 - What comprises a skilful strategic decision making process?
 - What do we mean by institutions?
 - How do we define successful?
 - Which institutions are successful and why?
 - Does the organisational design and structure aid or hinder strategic decision making?
 - Are managers necessary in good institutions?
 - How is good leadership recognised in a good institutional decision making process?
 - How do they pick up key signals?
 - How are good decisions communicated effectively?
 - How could they measure the quality of their approach to strategic decision making?

Those interested:

Roy
Martin
Eric

TABLE 4 [Eve's group] Linked and arising from Session 5 contribution

- Role of fear/anxiety (emotions)
- Measure \longrightarrow neurophysiological study and questionnaires to measure fear/anxiety
- Cognitive processes
 - Identify thoughts in meetings (interviews)
- Different contexts
 - Teams formal/loose groupings
 - Media type environments – informal
 - Etc
- Dynamics of interaction

Those interested:

Rosie Beckham

Eve Mitleton-Kelly

Eric van Loon

Susan Williams

Javier Baher

Robert Goodsell

Paul Stevens

Ken Eason

Garrick Jones

NEXT STEPS AND PROCESSES

Following a plenary discussion the following was agreed:

- Small, self-organising groups would meet to further discuss/progress their particular areas of interest
- Rosie Beckham kindly offered to provide space on the Triarchy website for:
 1. Participants to post brief details of key literature/research already available which they are already aware of.
 2. Participants to give details of 'what you know', as distinct from literature
[Note: only caveat is that a SoL member moderates the space and Roy Woodhead volunteered to take responsibility for this.]
- A follow-up half or full day workshop (with one or two speakers) to be arranged, hopefully in July.
- Eve Mitleton-Kelly said that SOL-UK would be very happy to organise and host the next plenary meeting but that the small groups need to be self organising and she encouraged the different groups to cross-pollinate.
- The issue of funding also needs to be considered and it was agreed that individual groups do some research into this as this approach would produce much more diversity.
- Jane Speller said that she would like to work with an organisation/global business that is really interested in this question and would be happy to volunteer to find out which big organisations might be interested in this but would need some help.

Observations on the day

The whole group felt it would be useful to reflect on how decisions were made during the day and the learning and the following observations were made:

- Though the small group work was very successful, some participants felt slightly frustrated not to be able to take part in all the discussions – positive criticism!
- There was almost a need to agree or find commonality with a group and also a need to be together again.
- A query was raised as to the rationale for why the day was organised as it was i.e. informally. Eve explained in retrospect the design group (Eve, Nazreen, Arie, Didier and Roy) came together to organise the day and were trying to achieve something novel and experimental and the design just emerged.
- It was a very rich day with high levels of energy and everyone learned a lot which would be only properly digested in a few weeks. There was also an element of personal learning and it was proposed that this be shared with the whole group at the next meeting e.g. ***‘Having now digested this, my expectations are the following...’***

Eve thanked everyone for contributing to an absolutely marvellous day which exceeded all expectations. She was excited and energised and looking forward to re-engaging with everyone in the near future and felt the need to make these connections stronger. SOL-UK would organise another meeting before the beginning of August and Eve encouraged everyone in the meantime to cross-pollinate.