

Editorial

Emotionally Intelligent MCDA?

This issue of the journal is given to the presentation and discussion of issues relating to the consideration of emotions and ethics in multicriteria decision analysis and aid. The debate is initiated in the paper by Fred Wenstøp, entitled ‘Mindsets, rationality and emotion in multicriteria decision analysis’; this is progressed in the contributions of five discussants and the key issues arising are highlighted and summarized in Fred’s rejoinder. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their stimulating and thought provoking writings.

The fundamental thinking which underpins the different mindsets debated dates back many centuries. However, the issue of emotions and their role in decision making is a topic which has enjoyed growing interest since the publication in 1994 of the book ‘*Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*’ by Damasio (1994). We are seeing a rapid growth in the possibilities for neurological research, which is beginning to reveal fascinating, albeit tentative, insights into the interactions between emotion and reason in decision making (for an accessible review, see the article entitled ‘Decisions and Desire’ by Morse, 2006).

I am sure that the topic is one that will provoke a range of responses and I hope it will prompt much further discussion. On the one hand, there are managers who maintain that ‘objective’ decision making, devoid of any shred of subjectivity or emotion, is both desirable and possible. I meet many of them each year in my MBA classes; they view MCDA with suspicion, but we engage in many lively debates. I doubt that anyone who considers herself or himself to be active in research or practice in the field of MCDA would dispute that, in most circumstances, some form of preference information is required of the decision maker(s). But do they question where these values come from and the role that emotion plays in shaping them? On the other hand, there are those who take the view that values and subjectivity, driven by emotion, pervade MCDA. Value judgements are

not only relevant in specifying explicit preference parameters such as acceptable trade-offs, aspiration levels or veto thresholds, they are central to the whole process—from the boundary judgements which define the initial framing of the problem, including the stakeholders to be considered and the alternatives to be evaluated, through the specification of criteria for the evaluation of the anticipated futures which will evolve as a result of the available choices and the associated preference information, to the determination of an action plan that is informed both by holistic, intuitive judgement and reasoned evaluation.

Whatever your perspective, the discussion contained herein will certainly raise questions. These may be philosophical; for example, does this way of thinking signify a new paradigm for MCDA or is it simply recognizing and raising awareness of issues that underpin ongoing research and practice? They may be theoretical; for example, what is the interplay between emotion, values and reason? Or they may be practical; for example, to what extent, and how should a facilitator/analyst seek to stimulate emotions in the processes of problem structuring, model building and use? I hope that this is just the start of an interesting debate that will engage many in and beyond the MCDA community, and would like to encourage discussion to continue beyond the papers published here. This can happen both through informal and immediate channels such as the MCRIT-L discussion list (information on the list and how to subscribe can be found at <http://www.terry.uga.edu/mcdm/>), and more formally through the pages of the journal. In particular, I would like to invite further short contributions to be submitted up to 31 December 2006, with a view to publishing an extended discussion in a future issue of the journal. I hope you are sufficiently interested and provoked to participate.

Theo Stewart and I (Belton and Stewart, 2002) defined MCDA as a collection of approaches to help individuals or groups explore ‘decisions that matter’; reflecting on what that means in light of

the discussion, perhaps things ‘matter’ because they evoke strong emotions?

REFERENCES

- Belton V, Stewart T. 2002. *Multicriteria Decision Analysis: An Integrated Approach*. Kluwer Academic Publishers: Dordrecht; 2.
- Damasio AR. 1994. *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. Putnam Publishing: New York.
- Morse G. 2006. Decisions and desire. *Harvard Business Review* **January**.

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