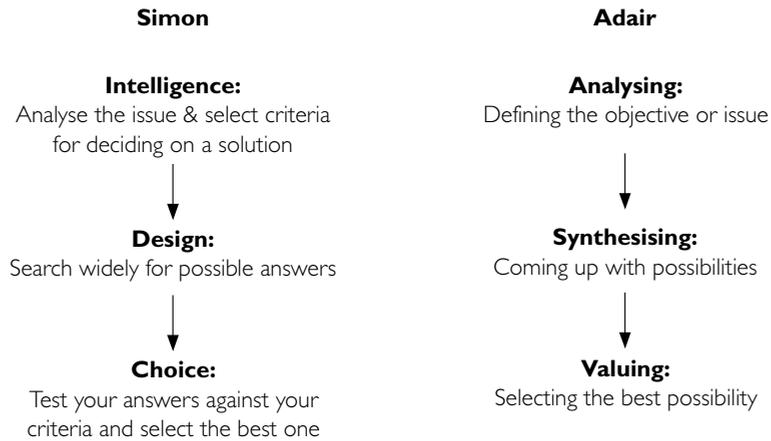


10.3.1 Three-stage models of decision making

Dealing with unprogrammed decisions in a structured way that still leaves sufficient space for creative thinking has led various writers to develop three-stage models of decision making. Each author gives them different names, but they look the same. Two important ones were developed by Herbert Simon and John Adair. (We have adapted this discussion from course B654, *The Effective Manager, Book 3 Making Decisions*, pp. 12–14, and from Adair, 1999.) Because of their similarity, we list them side by side.

The intelligence or analysing stage requires study of the problem and a search for information that is relevant to the issue and its resolution. Within this stage there is also a need to provide a clear specification of the criteria to be satisfied by the answer or answers. Adair and others stress that the key skill is the ability to ask the right questions. Only by asking the right questions in the right way will you be able to properly define the objective

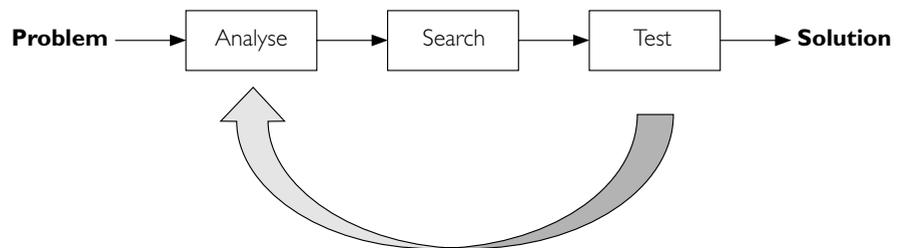


or goal of the decision which has to be made or the issue that has to be addressed, and work towards a solution.

The second stage is a systematic search for likely answers to the issue being addressed. This is where the application of creative thinking could prove useful. The third stage consists of choosing the best answer or answers to suit the criteria.

The three-stage model may help you to identify the separate stages you need to engage in during a decision-making or problem-solving process. But there is a drawback to representing them in this way – they make the process seem too linear. There is a danger of de Bono’s vertical thinking or shifting too much to Simon’s programmed decision. In reality, it is not a linear or a segmented process.

Simon, Adair and others stress that sometimes the process will not progress smoothly from one stage to another. There will be overlaps and the need to move backwards. The process may have produced an answer, but as you worked through the systematic path you may have changed your mind about the issue or about the criteria which your solution could satisfy. Or now that you have an answer, you feel that it will not do, and you need to go ‘round the loop’ again. Thus, following the three stages may be only the first stage of an iterative process.

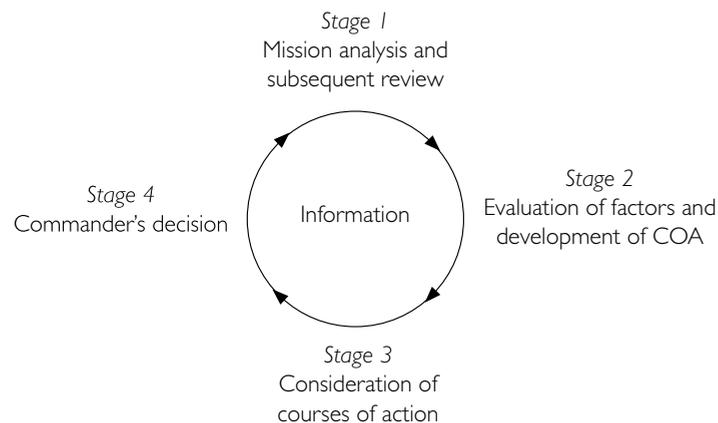


The British military has developed a very similar decision-making method, outlined in Box 10.2.

Box 10.2 Military decision-making model

The British military teaches a similar decision-making method, presenting it as a four-step, circular process. Stage 1 is the analysis of the mission and the tasks necessary to fulfil it. Stage 2 is to evaluate the military, political and environmental factors, and then to develop several courses of action (COA). This is equivalent to design, search or synthesise in the other models, and is where lateral thinking is most important. The military model splits up the final stage of the Simon and Adair models. Stage 3 is to list the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action – valuing or testing. Stage 4 is making a choice or a decision.

The diagram in the 'British army field manual' (MoD, 2002) is explicitly circular, with stage 1 including 'subsequent review'. This means the decisions have to be monitored and reviewed. If the situation changes, it is necessary to return to stage 1 and go around the circle again to be sure the original assumptions and decision are still valid.



The British army tries to decentralise its decision making and give maximum authority to commanders in the field, which can be quite important in a rapidly moving peace support operation. This decision-making cycle is linked to the relationship between a commander in the field and his or her superiors at headquarters. The mission will come from superiors, but it is for the commander to evaluate the conditions, develop the courses of action, and watch for changes in the situation. This process 'allows a commander – without waiting for further order – to exercise personal initiative and exploit a situation in a way which his superior would intend' (MoD, 2002).

The danger with models like this is that they are often applied mechanistically, creating a false sense of security. Decision takers set out the principal objective and then consider just a few possible alternatives, often derived from past decision-making experiences. They often just take small steps in the hope that outcomes can be predicted on the basis of what

happened in the past – turning an unprogrammed decision back into a programmed one by breaking it into small pieces. These models are a useful starting point but should be used flexibly. To try to avoid models being used mechanically, Adair developed a useful checklist of questions, which we give in Box 10.3 in an adapted form.

Finally, when making a decision, never overlook the power of a simple list. Write down the issue or the problem. Note your decision-making criteria. Then list all the possible solutions you can think of. Next to each possible solution or decision, list all the advantages and disadvantages that you can think of. This simple list will help highlight the many pluses or minuses of a course of action and weigh them up against each other. The actual process of creating the list will stimulate your thinking and help with analysis and the search for possibilities.

Box 10.3 A decision-making checklist

One aid to finding a solution to a problem is to develop a list of key questions that should always be answered, and then, when you think you have an answer, go through the list ticking off each question to be sure you have not missed anything. This list of questions is adapted from Adair (1999) and refers to the three-stage model.

Analyse:

- Have you carefully defined what the decision is about?
- Are you certain you know what it is you are trying to achieve?
- Have you identified all the important factors and actors involved?
- Should you spend more time on information gathering?
- Have you reduced the issue or decision down to its essence without oversimplifying?

Synthesise, search for possible answers:

- Have you used creative thinking to suggest possibilities?
- Have you considered the logic bubbles of the key stakeholders?
- Have you checked your assumptions?
- Have you shortlisted the most feasible possibilities?
- Have you thought of synthesising several solutions to see whether they offer a more effective solution than the one proposed?
- How will you judge which is the best decision to take? What are your criteria?

Select, evaluate, test:

- Have you considered your proposed decision from every aspect?
- How will it affect each stakeholder?



- Have you considered how the decision may be perceived by others?
- Have you thought of an implementation plan? Have you consulted, if needed, on this?
- How realistic is this plan?
- Do you have a contingency plan if this one fails or hits a major snag?

10.4 Two scenarios on choices and decisions

In this section we work through two detailed scenarios, based on real events in actual wars, to give you practice in decision-making and problem-solving skills. Negotiation skills have already come into play but we focus on them more specifically in Section 10.5, where we will also focus on some of the causes of interpersonal disputes and some ways of handling this difficult aspect of working relationships. When you read the textbook Chapter 11 'Preparing to intervene' by Jonathan Goodhand you will learn more about decision making and the 'filters' that shape decision-making processes.