

## **ABSTRACT**

What drives decision processes in public administration? What information do decision makers require to make a decision? Decisions made in the public sector routinely involve public money and public trust; yet, the question posed by V.O. Key (1940): “on what basis shall we decide to allocate funds to one program instead of another?” has become more rhetorical than answerable. Nevertheless, the answer to this question may be the “essence” of decision making in public administration. Contributing to an understanding of this essence is the objective of this study.

Attempts have been made to determine the core elements of decision making; however, such attempts offer a relatively global view of the decision maker and are not models of decision making per se. Although such paradigms are important to public administration in terms of categorizing and describing our conception of the decision maker as either rational, organizational, or governmental/political, they fall short of describing exactly what are the elements required by the decision maker--rational, organizational, or political--to make a decision?

The literature describes a range of decision techniques from positivistic, empirical decision models to models more discursive that are gaining momentum as they present options for dealing with normative decisions. However, these models, theoretical assumptions of decision-making alternatives, have not generally been tested for their utility as pragmatic models of decision making. In contrast, this study is exploratory research on the utility of basic models of decision making; and, as

such, our research is intended to generate hypotheses rather than test specific assumptions.

This study surveys city managers, nationally, to examine and assess the utility and applicability of current decision models presented in the literature to explore which models are valuable to managers. Following the national survey, a subset of respondents is interviewed to determine the phenomenology of their decision techniques by inquiring about a specific decision reached in their municipality. The information obtained in the manager interviews is used to support the national survey results and the formation of a new model of decision making for city managers.

Our results show that city managers are incremental decision makers and overwhelmingly reject technocratic methods. Furthermore, there may be a heuristic thread that pervades all decision models, affecting the decision model choice. Finally, this study proposes a new model of decision making for city managers based on the survey and interview information.