



## **Decision Map: World View, Reality, and Rules Applied**

*by Royce Holladay*

Decision making is a dynamical process—forces that are not measurable have unpredictable influence in creating an outcome. The Decision Map attempts to simplify the complexity of decision making by bringing into awareness the range of forces that are at play in any one given decision. There is no way to know how or to what degree the World View, Reality, and/or Rules influence any given decision, but that is not the point of the Decision Map. Its purpose is to support decision makers in unbraiding complex threads of influence on a decision so they might find options for action they had not previously considered.

A decision map explores three threads of decision making.

- **World View** describes the perspective of the decision maker(s). Based in values, beliefs, and drives, an individual's World View is what colors the ways the world is seen. For groups, World View emerges from the shared experiences, vision and goals, and values of the members.
- **Rules** describe the set of expectations—spoken or understood—that govern the work and activities related to the decision to be made. They may include regulations, formal rules, and laws. At the same time, they may include informal expectations or social norms.
- **Reality** speaks to the evidence or resources available to the decision makers. What do they see? What can they obtain? What is "real" for them in making this decision?

Navigating a ship provides a useful metaphor for understanding the relationship among the threads of any decision. A sailor's **World View** involves **beliefs** about the nature of water, wind, tides, stars, machinery, and locomotion, as well as her own relation to each of those and to herself. **Reality** consists of the **specific circumstances** that a sailor might find herself in – the particular individuals she is with, the wind speed, type of weather, water temperature, the ship she is on. This sailor will use **Rules** she knows about sailing to **guide** her in navigating the ship, e.g., how she operates the ship's engines, the conventions for passing other ships, signaling her intentions, hailing other ships. The act of navigation—her actual behavior—involves all three, World View, Reality, and Rules. Each day every person navigates his or her own world by making decisions against the backdrop of his or her own World View, Reality, and Rules.

The Decision Map represents these three components of decision making and their dynamical relationships to each other. It shows the three major factors that contribute to any decision process—World View, Reality, and Rules, and how they are interdependent. Decisions emerge from the on-going interaction of all three.

### **Using the Decision Map...**

The Decision Map is a versatile, robust tool that offers insight at all levels of a system. Its applications can help increase coherence at the individual, group, or system level, by clarifying and aligning World View, Reality, and Rules.

#### **...At the Organizational Level**

Leaders have a need to understand the systems in which they work. Using the Decision

Map at the organizational level provides insights about how a system operates in its environment. By observing behavior across the organization, by reviewing past decisions, and by interviewing individuals at all levels inside the organization, as well as those in the customer base and vendor pool, leaders can gather information to help them understand the Decision Map of the whole organization.

Once the current Map is articulated, the leader can then begin to identify where and what types of changes might need to be made. The following questions might help leaders “see” their organizations in more specific ways.

- Is the Decision Map coherent throughout the organization? Do middle managers make decisions in the same way top management does? Do the line workers share the common Decision Map?
- What is the Mental Model of the total system and does it serve to move the organization toward its stated goals?
- How does the Decision Map of the internal workers align with the Decision Maps of the clients/customers? How does it align with the Decision Map of the vendors?

This thorough understanding of how decisions are made across the system can help leaders make choices about influencing or shifting any part of the organization’s Map.

The World View of the organization can be shifted through branding, intensive communications strategies, and ongoing reinforcement of the changes the leader wants to see.

### **...To Understand/Influence Group Interactions**

Members of teams, committees, and other work groups can use the Decision Map to understand their own work together in much the same way it is used at the organizational level. For example, they can

- articulate an agreed-upon Decision Map to guide their work together;
- use the organizational Decision Map, clarifying for their own purposes how they each interpret and apply it in their work together;
- work to understand the Decision Map of their customers/clients to more clearly align their products and services to external needs.

### **... To Understand/Influence Patterns**

Patterns of performance or behavior are established as individuals absorb, organize, interpret, and communicate information. These activities are influenced by the Decision Maps of the individuals who create the patterns. By understanding what lies at the heart of a given pattern, leaders can then use that understanding to either damp or amplify a particular pattern by working to shift the Decision Map generating it.

### **...To Understand/Influence Decision Making**

This tool can be used to facilitate decision making for groups or for an individual. In either case, the process would be similar.

Make certain that the participants first understand the meaning associated with each corner of the map. If they are not sure of the meaning, use examples and discussion to help them gain that understanding before applying it in a particular situation.

Ask each participant to reflect on his/her own World View, Reality, and Rules around the decision in question and about possible outcomes and their impact on the work to be done. Questions they could ask themselves include the following.

- What are my personal beliefs?
- How do I feel about the decision?

- What exists in Reality in this situation?
- Is there a part of Reality I might be missing?
- How can I gather further facts and/or data?
- What Rules are important here?
- What are the written regulations or policies that apply?
- What are my own simple rules or values that apply?
- What would be socially acceptable or appropriate here?

Once they have had a few minutes for reflection, the facilitator may take the conversation in one of a couple of directions.

- Either going around the room or inviting random responses, ask people to share what they want to share about their own maps. Make it explicit that they don't have to share if what their reflections are too personal, but ask them to share whatever they can that might have an impact on the decision. Then move on to discussing the question to be decided.
- Move directly into the discussion, asking the participants to keep their own Decision Maps in mind as they engage in the conversation. Facilitate the discussion by pointing out when there appears to be a difference among the participants concerning one of the corners. Help them to negotiate those differences and move toward a resolution of the question to be decided.

### **...To Resolve Conflict**

The Decision Map can be used to help individuals or groups resolve conflicts by helping them articulate for each other their own World View, Reality, and Rules. Through this sharing, individuals can come to understand where the heart of their conflict lies. Do they have conflicting World Views? Do they see reality differently? Are their rules in conflict? Using this tool can help them find ways to negotiate their differences.

1. Ask each participant to reflect on his/her own World View, Reality, and Rules around the decision in question and about possible outcomes and their impact on the work to be done. Questions they could ask themselves include the following.
  - What are my personal beliefs?
  - How do I feel about this situation?
  - What exists in Reality in this situation for me?
  - Is there a part of Reality I might be missing?
  - How can I gather further facts and/or data?
  - What Rules are important here to me?
  - What are the written regulations or policies that apply?
  - What are my own simple rules or values that apply?
  - What would be socially acceptable or appropriate here?
2. Engage the parties in dialogue about their conflict, asking each to keep their own Decision Map in mind. Approaches may include, but are not limited to the following.
3. Ask them to share their perspectives, looking for where differences and commonalities lie.
4. Ask them to clarify the stories their individual World Views are creating to focus on the facts at hand.
5. Ask each person to identify three questions they want to ask the other, and then allow them to alternate in asking those questions. The questions must be about the conflict in hand, and cannot be blaming or accusatory in nature. When the first person asks his or her question, the other person must be allowed to answer as fully as possible, with no interruptions. One or two follow-up questions or clarifying questions may be asked by the first person, once the second one has completed

his/her answer. Then the participants switch, and the second one asks a question that must be answered fully. Go through the questions until all are answered or until they have negotiated their resolution.

### **...In Retrospective Reflection**

Strong leaders take the time to reflect on and learn from their past actions. Both successes and failures have a great deal to teach, and one way of framing the lessons is through the application of the Decision Map.

### **Imbalance in the Triangle**

At any given decision, ideally, the three corners of the Decision Map should be relatively balanced, forming an approximate equilateral triangle. Difficulties arise in decision making when one corner begins to overpower the other two.

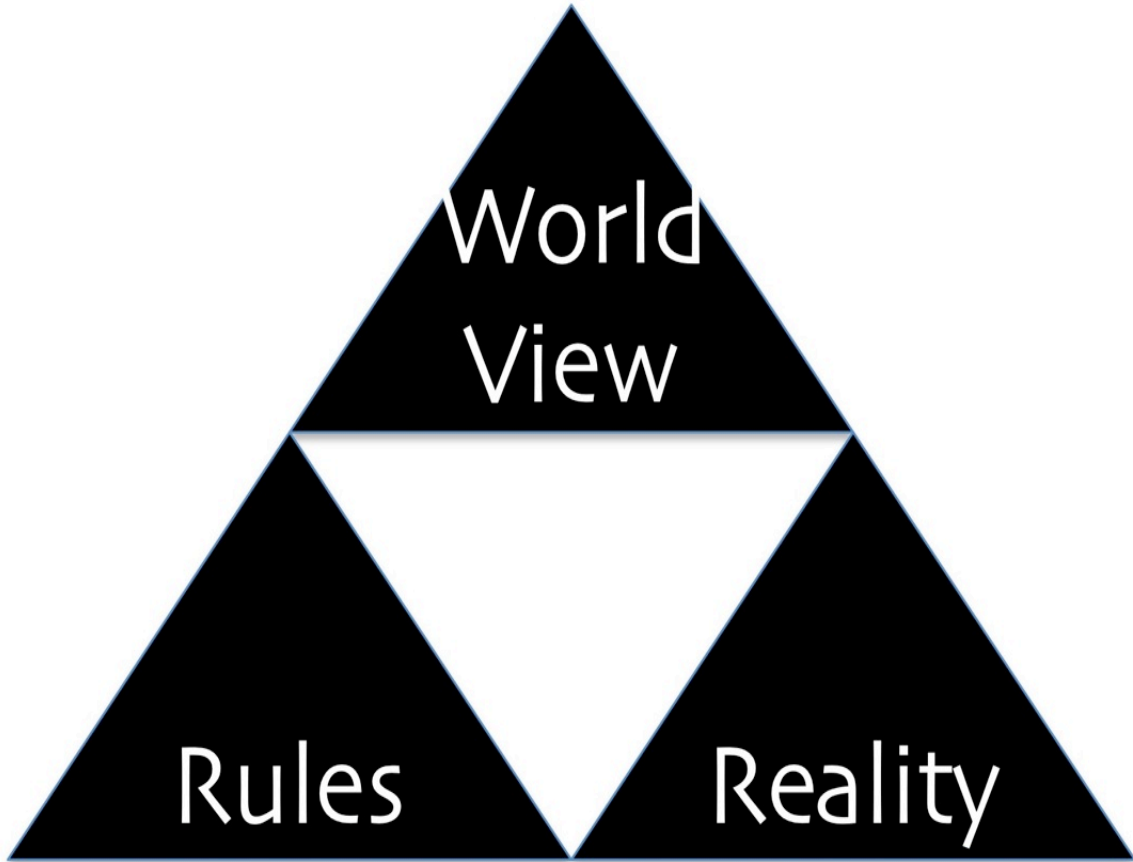
**Too much World View** - When those involved in decisions allow their own personal World View to get in the way of making the best decision, the result will not be for the good of the whole system. This happens when decision makers "lead with their hearts, rather than their heads," and make their choices based on selfish or self-focused reasons. When this is the case, Rules get broken--unethical practices are used, laws or regulations are ignored, or social expectations are violated. When there is too much World View in the decision, Reality gets ignored--timelines are not met, budgets get overrun, or resources are wasted. Too often this behavior can result in disastrous outcomes.

**Too much Reality** - This sounds like a poster straight out of the 1960's, but when the focus in a decision is too strongly centered around available data and information, too little attention gets paid to the personal needs of the individuals (World Views are not considered), or too little attention is paid to the expectations and regulations that have been agreed upon in the system (Rules are sometimes ignored). The results can be damaged relationships and loss of reputation for an individual or for an organization.

**Too much Rules** - Again, this may sound like a protester's placard, but it is a danger in decision making. When the Rules are too much the focus, World Views are ignored, and people are forced into situations that may violate their own best interests or values. When Reality is subjugated to Rules, the loss or misuse of resources is highly likely. Either way, such a decision cannot be good for the system, as a whole.

When leaders are able, on reflection, to understand their decision through the lens of the Decision Map, they can better understand the impacts of those decisions. These reflective leaders can learn how ignoring or diminishing the value the total Decision Map can impede effective decision making. Additionally, through their reflection, they can become more aware of how, in the future, to consider all three corners of the Decision Map and make more balanced decisions for the systems in which they work.

# Decision Map



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