Chapter 5
Influences of Personal Experience in Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

Among the aspects that conform the human cognition and therefore, the behavior observed in the choices, there is the individual experience. Researches point the experience performing either positive as negative roles in the process of decision-making. Motivated by the question, What is the role of the experience in the decision-making? this text sought to check in which way the state of art and the technique of Cognitive Sciences could contribute with the better understanding of the cognitive processing in the context of decision-making. It was adopted as a start the roles’ structured exposition of the cognition elements during the decision process, as Spiegel’s (2014) proposal. It was investigated through a systematic revision of the literature, the impacts of the decision-maker’s experience in the manifestation of attention, categorization, memory and emotion. As a result, 17 inferences that present which is the role of the experience in the decision-making, and deeply, which are the implications of the experience in the cognitive process of the decision-maker, are presented.

INTRODUCTION

The decision-making study has as a target the understanding of the human ability of process multiple alternatives and choose an action course. The problem’s perception and/or the responsibility attribution by the resolution the decision-maker’s responsibility. The decision-maker is the individual or group on who lays the responsibility of dealing with the presented problem and, therefore, some fundamental factors linked to them change the way of how the decision occurs. The number of decision-makers, as well as the quality and the personal preference, defines the solution of the decision-making process (Spiegel, 2011).

Decisions are not equal and neither have the same difficulty degree, but they are all dependent on the mental model of their decision-makers. The agents may be evaluated by their individual knowledge about the problem, the resolution ability of each one of them, their desires and interests and the ethical and moral standards that guide them. Recognize the variety among the decision-makers is also necessary,
since the performance will be determined by the adjustment of the tasks’ demands with the capacity, knowledge and the willingness to use effort of the decision-maker (Spiegel, 2011). Among the aspects that conform the human cognition and therefore, the observed behavior, is the personal experience. Bohanec (2003) defines the decision-making process as an “art that requires the decision-maker combines experience and education to act”. Decision-makers based themselves on their personal experiences in order to make choices.

Basic researches in cognitive psychology suggest that most part of the experience’s advantage of the decision-makers is placed on their greater knowledge stock, associated to the memory’s processes, and mainly in the way they organize their knowledge, defined by the categorization processes, in order for it to be effectively brought to deal with the problem.

Rakow and Newell (2010) conclude their exposition presenting that this theme remains open and lacks of researches, and suggest the central point should be the question “Which is the role of the experience?” instead of “What happens in the choice based on the experience?”. For them although the role of the experience has been explored in framing researches, it’s still misunderstood in relation to its importance in a series of daily decisions.

Thus, this chapter proposes to investigate which is the role of experiences of the decision-makers agents and the impact of these in the functioning of the cognitive process of a human decision maker.

BACKGROUND

The Experience Definition: A First Object Approach

Rocha (2008) points out that are large and complex the variety of meanings the term experience can take and the point of views they could be studied are numerous. According to Oxford dictionary, experience refers to the “practical contact with, and the observation of facts and events. The knowledge or ability acquired by a period of practical experience in something, specially obtained by a specific profession”. The Business dictionary defines it as the “familiarity with an ability or area of the knowledge acquired over months or years of practice and that, probably resulted in a superior understanding or domain”.

Bondía (2002) introduces the mentioned concept that the experience is, in Spanish, “o que nos passa”, in Portuguese, “o que nos acontece”; in French “ce que nous arrive”; in Italian, “quello che nos succede” or “quello che nos accade”; in English, “that what is happening to us”; in German, “was passiert ist”, and not what is up, what is happening, or what touches. The author seeks to highlights with this construction, the difference between an event and the experience lived by individuals. This emphasis in the process that “occurs” with the individual is highlighted by the author by presenting the Heidegger’s understanding.

[...] having an experience with something means that something happen to us, reach us; that takes hold of us, tumbles us and changes us. When we say “have” an experience, this doesn’t precisely mean that we make it happen, “make’ here means: suffer, feel, take what reaches us receptively, accept, as we submit to something. Make an experience means so, let us to be approached in ourselves by what challenge us, entering and being submitted to that. We can then be transformed by such experiences, from one day to the other or along the time. (Heidegger, 1987: 143 apud Bondía, 2002: 25).