

Adam, while still in heaven, made a decision. The act and phenomenon of decision-making (DM), thus, became part of our lives even before Adam landed on this planet. This is the primacy of DM. We are all aware of Adam's decision very well, mentioned in the Old Testament; Adam chose to eat a forbidden fruit, thus, went wrong in his very first DM exercise. We also know the consequences of that fundamental mistake in decision-making.

Such is the significance of DM. As far as Adam's mistake is concerned, the human race has not forgotten the legacy. We keep committing mistakes in decision-making actions, therefore repeating Adam's mistake again and again. The range of mistakes varies from individual to individual and from nation to nation.

From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment our heads hit the pillow in the night, we remain busy in making decisions. We remain deeply and incessantly involved in making various types and categories of decisions. These are strategic decisions, operational decisions, personal decisions, group decisions, routine decisions, policy decisions and political decisions, and the list is far from complete. Let us focus on the political decisions and political DM paradigm in Pakistan.

The illustrated cycle is self-explanatory. To some scholars and scientists of management sciences, DM is a triangle. The three sides of the triangle comprise logic, experience and intuition. The act of DM is a

balancing act of art. Let me pick up another tool on the way to review political decisions in Pakistan. These are the concepts of 'Vertical Thinking' and 'Lateral Thinking'.

Vertical Thinking can be described as moving from known to known. It could also be described as choosing out of given options. It implies following the pre-determined and lay down methods and procedures, and choosing out of the available options. It also implies structured DM. For instance, if you are asked what would you like to have, tea or cold drink? You decide to take tea. Therefore, it would be an example of Vertical Thinking and structured DM.

Lateral Thinking endeavours to question the motives of the problem. It allows the decision-maker to go on an unmarked route. Lateral thinker would then explore new options, new alternatives and new ways to satisfy the problem, or even redefine the problem. Lateral thinker, thus, does not move from known to known; it moves from known to unknown. It exposes new possibilities with this shift and change in paradigm. Lateral thinking draws new parameters. It would collect the specifics and deduce principles. It will also induce creative thinking based on the generalised principles.

Let us now review some well-known political decisions in the backdrop of dynamics of DM.

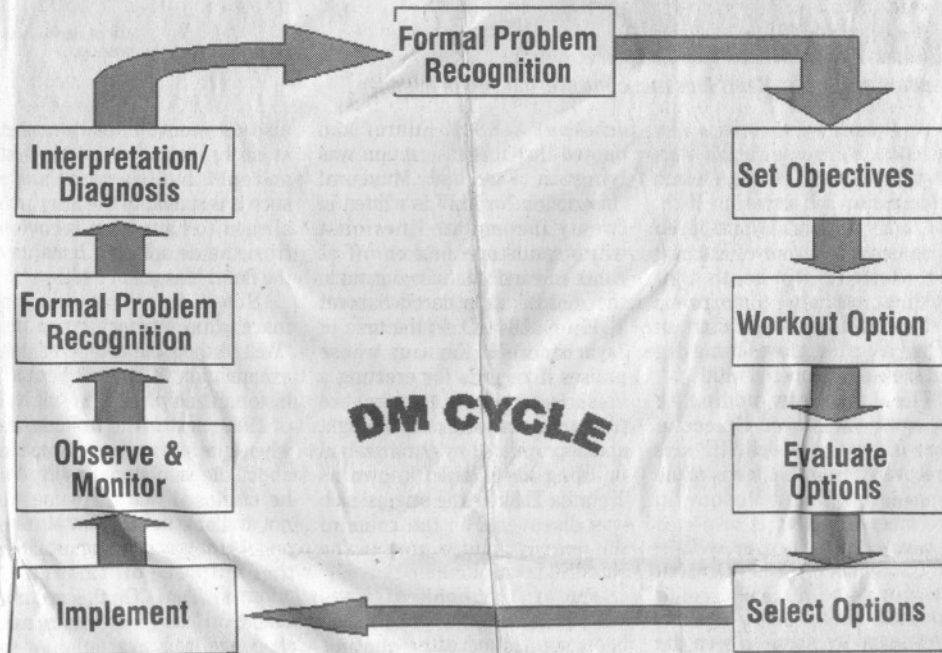
Recently government took a decision to introduce a system of local government. Government supposed aim was devolution of power and strengthening the people's representatives—Councilors, Naib Nazims and Nazims. It specifically excluded

Dynamics of decision-making

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Personal biases or prejudices inflict the process of decision-making the most

By Bakhtiar Hakeem



members of provincial assemblies and national assembly from the administration. It envisaged centralising the instruments of

government at the district level under District Nazim, modifying the British legacy of Deputy Commissioner and

Superintendent Police.

The exponents of this idea, with General Naqvi in the lead, wanted to empower the 105

districts of Pakistan. So what are the results of this system after one year of its inception? The day provincial assemblies came into being, chief-ministers vouched to review and redesign the local government system, as suited to uphold the supremacy of provincial government. The day national assembly started functioning, the system was effectively installed. The architect of the local government system, General Naqvi was sacked from his post of Chairman National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB), and within weeks the implementation was stopped. Now, after so many months, the entire local government system has come to a halt.

Fifteen years ago the Federal Government of Pakistan approved the project of Kalabagh Dam. People of Sindh, as well as Sindh Government, raised their concern and reservations against the Dam. Later, the NWFP Government reacted in a similar manner and Federal Government's decision faced stiff resistance. All the preparations in terms of surveys, feasibility, domestic and foreign funding, have been kept in suspension since last decade. Every successive government launches some decisions but later on withdraws from them.

In the '70s, a decision was made to electrify Pakistan Railways. The decision was implemented in the '80s. In the first phase, the route between Khanewal and Lahore was electrified. Since then, electrically powered engines tow the brake between the aforesaid destinations. Beyond both ends power is changed and diesel

engines do the unfinished job.

Similarly, the Ministry of Health initiated another scheme in the '70s. The scheme was to market medicines under generic names. The ultimate aim of the scheme was to provide cheap medicines to the common man. Millions of rupees were consumed to change over to new system. We are back to the old system. Every medicine is being sold under its brand name. Medicines are costly and beyond the reach of common man.

'70s was also a decade of nationalisation. GoP started nationalising one institution after another. Many private enterprises were nationalised too. In the '90s, the GoP preferred privatisation on nationalisation. The extreme is being experienced now. Even the educational institutes are being privatised. The recent University Bill is a modified form of privatisation.

During her second tenure, Benazir Bhutto preferred International Independent Power Producers (IPPs) to generate power for Pakistan. IPPs are now selling a unit for five times increased price than what we can produce through hydal sources. Could we run our trains on the power generated by the IPPs?

Let us examine now where did the process of DM went wrong, keeping the above-mentioned examples as case studies.

Personal biases or prejudices inflict the process of DM the most. We keep going wrong time and again due to personal biases or the mind set prejudices; sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly.

Nepotism and parochialism has given rise to both arrogance and stubborn prejudices.

In many cases, decision-making is not sincere to the nation or the country. Sometimes, decisions are based on inaccurate data. Enough efforts are not made to collect the right data from the right sources. The decision-making bodies go wrong, repeatedly, in identifying the problem. Most of the times, the symptoms camouflage the real problems and we keep treating the symptoms without ever tackling the root cause.

The decision-makers are either ignorant or purposely kept aloof. Those entrusted to take the burden of DM shirk the responsibility. Either they do not have the courage to face the challenge or they become prisoners of procrastination. Some fear the consequences of the decision.

At times Federal Government takes wrong initiatives and takes decisions, which should have been taken at provincial level, thus fail to muster the requisite acceptance and consequently fail in implementation. Our leaders lack vision and will to implement their decisions.

Our decision-makers also do not possess the technical know-how of the decisions that they make, therefore, they are bound to go wrong. They even lack the courage to accept it and never make up for their shortcomings.

All these problems contribute to bad decision-making in Pakistan. In order to pursue lasting and result-oriented decisions, we must learn from our past mistakes and try not to repeat them.