

# Dramatic Dilemmas: Drama-based Decision Support

PDW Proposal No. 10996

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## Abstract

For nearly two decades we have been trying to find appropriate ways to support executive decision takers and dedicated most of both our academic research and our consultancy to this issue. We developed a conceptual framework and some practices for coaching, a software tool for knowledge engineering, and three post-experiential, post-MBA courses for management education. Building on this prior experience, we have been focusing recently on development of executives in their organizational context – we offer this contextualized development as a next-generation decision support.

The scene of our workshop is the chaotic-turbulent world of organizations and our executive is a *drama hero* (as opposed to the *action hero*) in constant doubt about right and wrong. We started using dramas several years ago to depict decision situations as they over-emphasize the characters, making the conflict more obvious. In the catharsis the executives realized: “this happened to me” or “this could have happened to me” or “this can happen to me tomorrow”. We have found this approach to education of executives and executive coaches fruitful, and now we are taking the ‘dramatic dilemmas’ from the classroom into the organizational context of decision takers. The main problem that we are trying to address is changing how the executive views a particular situation. To achieve this, the executive has to change the conceptual framework and we have found that switching from the old concepts to the new ones requires a ‘*trigger concept*’. In this PDW we offer the participants a hands-on experience of this process.

## Keywords

Executive development, Coaching, Drama-based education, Decision dilemmas, Decision support

## Presenters

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## Workshop Overview

### Introduction

The five of us have spent many years working *with, for, and on* executive decision takers in various ways. We have worked as executive coaches, we have been doing research and published academic papers and books about executive decision takers and how to support them, we have acted as knowledge engineers and developed the knowledge-based expert system Doctus, we have been teaching decision takers in classroom environments and developing them in their organizational contexts. Our research, teaching, and consultancy mutually affect each other. We use our consultancy experience as input for our research, we include our research findings in our teaching and also use them in our consultancy, etc. We have also used our multi-faceted experience to design post-experiential, post-MBA courses for decision takers. Three years ago, we started a drama-based course for executives and executive coaches (Baracskai et al., 2010); based on this experience we have developed a more personalized approach for supporting and developing executives in their natural organizational context.

Our use of dramas with executives started from our focus on the decision dilemmas the executives face on daily basis. Where are these dilemmas described? More often than not, like March (March & Augier, 2004: 173) did, we ended up with the classics of literature, from Sophocles through Shakespeare to Mrožek, as the best examples we could find. Using dramas as a vehicle of educating executive decision takers and their coaches proved very useful. First, the dramas over-emphasize the characters thus making the conflict situation more obvious. Second, the dramas are not real business situations, so executives will not have the anxiety accompanying it, but the dramas are also not some hypothetical case studies detached from their everyday lives. Dramas are not specific to any business discipline but they are suf-

ficiently close to any executive's daily experience so they can relate to the 'dramatic dilemmas'. Finally, and most importantly, the essence of the dramas is the catharsis, in which the executives realize: "*this happened to me*" or "*this could have happened to me*" or "*this can happen to me tomorrow*". Based on the few years of experience in using dramas for educating executive decision takers in a classroom environment, in this PDW we introduce the idea of using the dramas for developing executive decision takers in their natural organizational context as a new approach to executive decision support.

The process starts from depicting decision situations similar to what the executive is faced with; for this we have put together a portfolio of decision dilemmas. The fundamental idea is to change the way the executives are looking at their decision dilemmas. Of course, we do not want to impose our view on decision takers, we do not offer another 'single right' solution instead of the existing one. Instead, similarly to Mintzberg's (1994) left-handed planners, we challenge the executives mindset but then they build their new view of their dilemmas. However, we found that it is not sufficient to challenge the executives' view as it is anchored in their current conceptual framework. Therefore we also help the executives build a new conceptual framework in which they can develop their new mindset. Conversely, the new conceptual framework consists of terms not yet understood, and thus we realized that we need a special concept, which has a 'foot in both worlds' (conceptual frameworks), to help switching to the new conceptual framework. We call the special concept the '*trigger concept*'. For this PDW we organize the 'dramatic dilemmas', provide some fundamental concepts of the old and the new framework, suggest a trigger concept for various dilemma categories, and take the participants on a journey of switching their view of a particular decision dilemma as an illustration of how our approach works.

## PDW Context

We regard the world in which organizations operate chaotic, meaning that changes are unexpected in terms of direction, size and impact. (Cf e.g. Drucker, 1969; Friedman, 2009; Handy, 1995; Nordström & Ridderstråle, 2002; Prahalad, 1998) In this world we contrast the *lean and mean* organizations with those characterized by *communityship* (Mintzberg, 2006, 2009) based on the engagement (Mintzberg et al., 2002) of the members of the community. The executives of the lean and mean organizations are the *action heroes*. They have no doubts, they always ‘know’ what is the right thing to achieve (as they were told, usually short-term profitability), and they deliver the performance to achieve it. (Cf Mintzberg, 2007) Many executives are action heroes, but many are not. We watched executives struggling with doubts as they could not know the outcomes of their actions in the chaotic world of business. Their world is not deterministic, they cannot control everything, and often they do not even know how to distinguish good from evil in a particular situation. Gradually we realized that they are *drama heroes* (cf heroic vs. engaging management introduced by Mintzberg et al., 2002). Drama heroes fight for something no one else fights for, doubt themselves and can never find out whether it was for a good cause or not. This kind of executive, in an organization characterized by communityship, is who we want to support using our drama-approach.

## Portfolio of Dilemmas

We have created a portfolio of decision dilemmas (see table below) according to the role of the executive we plan to develop/support (columns) and what is new (rows). We did not aim for a comprehensive categorization but our experience shows that the coverage is fairly extensive. In a particular case it may be worth revising the portfolio. Apart from using the table in our consultancy work for systematization and orientation we also use it as a guide to get

the executives acquainted with our approach and we will use it in the same fashion in this PDW.

	DREAM BIG (CEO)	DON'T WAIT FOR A SMART STRATEGY (CIO)	ACCEPT DIFFERENT STRUCTURES (CKO)	CREATE INNOVA- TIVE ECOLOGY (CHO)
<b>new paradigm</b>	1. RISKY VS. UN- IMAGINABLE	2. ORIGINAL VS. IMITATION	3. MEASURABLE VS. IMMEASURABLE	4. REPLACEABLE VS. IRREPLACEA- BLE
<b>new context</b>	5. RESPONSIBILITY VS. INTELLECTU- AL INTEGRITY	6. COMPLETE VS. INCOMPLETE	7. FACTS VS. INTERPRETATION	8. CONSUME-IDIOT VS. NETOCRAT
<b>new validation</b>	9. HOPE VS. POS- SIBILITY	10. PRE-FILTER VS. POST-FILTER	11. COOL VS. RETRO	12. FRENETIC CHAS- ING VS. URGENCY
<b>new identity</b>	13. GLOBAL VS. LOCAL	14. MASSES VS. TRIBES	15. INTEGRATED VS. DIFFERENTIAT- ED	16. RESOURCE VS. HUMAN BEING

Once we assembled the portfolio of dilemmas we have identified the available and the new conceptual frameworks (by means of several key concepts) as well as the trigger concepts that help switching from the old framework to the new one (see table below).

DILEMMAS	AVAILABLE CONCEPTS		TRIGGER CONCEPT	NEW CONCEPTS	
<b>RISKY VS. UNIMAGINABLE</b>	prediction	causality	<b>sensemaking</b>	<b>new alchemists</b>	<b>black swan</b>
<b>ORIGINAL VS. IMITATION</b>	intellectual property	compatibility		<b>free</b>	<b>Swiss army knife</b>
<b>MEASURABLE VS. IMMEASURABLE</b>	goals	reactions		<b>metaphors</b>	<b>chaos</b>
<b>REPLACEABLE VS. IRREPLACEABLE</b>	market norms	penalty/reward		<b>social norms</b>	<b>motivation 3.0</b>
<b>RESPONSIBILITY VS. INTEGRITY</b>	success	karaoke	<b>doubt</b>	<b>tolerance of failure</b>	<b>beta-version</b>
<b>COMPLETE VS. IN- COMPLETE</b>	guarantee	buy-ology		<b>non-finito</b>	<b>experience</b>
<b>FACTS VS. INTERPRETATION</b>	position	game theory		<b>big picture</b>	<b>narratives</b>
<b>CONSUME-IDIOT VS. NETOCRAT</b>	market segment	4P		<b>social media</b>	<b>tipping point</b>
<b>HOPE VS. POSSIBILITY</b>	reliability	best practice	<b>domain of validity</b>	<b>abduction</b>	<b>incrementality</b>
<b>PRE-FILTER VS. POST-FILTER</b>	limited resources	wasting		<b>abundance</b>	<b>the price of free- dom</b>
<b>COOL VS. RETRO</b>	audit	models		<b>irrational</b>	<b>human fallibility</b>
<b>FRENETIC CHASING VS. URGENCY</b>	self- complacency	work-flow		<b>challenge</b>	<b>unexplored paths</b>
<b>GLOBAL VS. LOCAL</b>	owners	to delegate	<b>boldness</b>	<b>subsidiarity</b>	<b>the world is flat</b>
<b>MASSES VS. TRIBES</b>	image	consumer behaviour		<b>reputation</b>	<b>like</b>
<b>INTEGRATED VS. DIFFERENTIATED</b>	hierarchy	employee		<b>communityship</b>	<b>multiple loyalties</b>
<b>RESOURCE VS. HUMAN BEING</b>	tasks	surveillance		<b>outliers</b>	<b>20% of freedom</b>

As the next step, we have chosen dramas for the 16 decision dilemmas as well as related management thinkers. For each dilemma we use the drama to discuss the essence of the dilemma with the executive and then use the works of the management thinkers, starting with the trigger concept, to reinterpret what the dilemma at hand means for the executive and thus achieve the new conceptual framework.

### **Dramas as Decision Support**

Our drama-based approach to developing executives and using this development as decision support is rooted in the constructivist approach of Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978). It is also closely related to the importance of narratives for executives (Boje, 1991; Denning, 2005), it focuses on the choices of executives (Iyengar, 2011) in terms of how they make sense (Martin, 2009; Pink, 2006; Weick, 1995) of their context trying to make a difference (Godin, 2011). According to Mintzberg and Lampel (2001) executives tend to fail in similar ways – we are trying to help them succeed in different ways.

In order to provide the participants of the PDW with hands-on experience of how our drama-based approach to developing executives in their organizational context works in as means of decision support, we use the example of decision dilemma 13 ‘LOCAL VS. GLOBAL’ in the workshop. The underlying drama is ‘The Emigrants’ (Mrožek, 1984) and the audience can use the thoughts of various business thinkers for the re-interpretation but in focus of the presenters is ecological thinking of Friedman (2009) and Handy’s (1995) subsidiarity. This dilemma is also a ‘case study’ in the classical sense, as we will have used it in Zagreb, Croatia prior to the conference and thus we can share our experience with the participants of the PDW.

## Presenters

The 5 people running this workshop<sup>1</sup> are long-time collaborators. Four of them are academics working in business education as their primary job, doing consultancy alongside it, while one is primarily a consultant holding several visiting professor positions. All the authors have considerable experience working with executives and executive coaches. Three of the authors have designed 3 generations of post-experiential post-MBA courses, 2 of which have earlier been introduced at AoM conferences. Building on these bases this PDW focuses on development of executive decision takers in their natural context.

## Sponsors

This primary focus of this workshop is on the *development of executives* using the drama approach. It introduces a novel approach supporting executive decision takers through developing them in their natural organizational contexts. Therefore this PDW is of primary interest to the MED division. The drama(tic) situations, one of which we are introducing in this PDW, describe decision dilemmas in the chaotic world of business which the executives are faced with. The executives may learn, apart from an insight into what kind of conflicts they are facing, what they can expect from a capable executive coach and the coaches can learn what the executives need support with; thus this PDW is also of interest to the MC division. The dramas are used in changing the cognition of the decision dilemmas using a trigger concept; thus the PDW is also of potential interest to the MOC division.

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the 5 presenters, another 4 people have been involved in developing the conception and the application of the drama-based approach introduced in this workshop: Dijana Ivezić, Drenislav Zekić, Vili Matula, and Saša Baracskai.

## **Workshop format**

### *Phase 1: Presentation (30 minutes)*

The PDW starts with a presentation outlining the drama-based approach to executive development, introducing the portfolio of dilemmas with the associated dramas, describes the process of changing conceptual frameworks using the trigger concept.

### *Phase 2: Hands-on work on a chosen dilemma (60 minutes)*

The main part of the workshop starts by one of the presenters outlining a drama situation which describes a typical dilemma of the chaotic world of business. The dilemma is *introduced* through the drama situation and then *interpreted* using the thoughts of the greatest business thinkers going through the process of switching from the current conceptual framework to a new one. This re-interpretation is done by the participants of the workshop (individually or in small groups) using the workbook provided by the organizers.

### *Phase 3: Discussing the lessons learned (30 minutes)*

The final phase of the workshop is a *plenary discussion* of the interpretations of the dilemmas and the implications to the work of the participants.

## **Statement**

“I have received signed statements from all intended participants agreeing to participate for the entire workshop, AND that these participants are not in violation of the Rule of Three + Three.”

Viktor Dörfler  
submitter

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