

THE IMPORTANCE OF DECISION MAKING FOR INFORMATION AND LIBRARY MANAGERS

Jumino^{1*)}

^{1*)} *Library Science Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University
Jl. Prof. Soedarto, SH, Kampus Undip Tembalang, Semarang, Indonesia.*

^{*)} Correspondence: jumino@live.undip.ac.id

Abstract

This articles deals with the importance of decision making done by Information and Library Managers. The method used is document study with qualitative approach. The results of the analysis show that decision making for Information and Library Managers are an essential function in managing library and information service. It is the primary task of Information and Library Managers, since every function of management a library needs a decision to be applied. It involves the stages of decision making process, such as defining objectives, collecting information, choosing and discussing alternatives, implementing decisions, delegating jobs, and evaluating them. Furthermore, there two types of Information and Library Managers, rational and irrational[managers. Rational managers worked with their subordinates in group, delegated to their subordinates, and the final decision belonged to the subordinates. On the other hand, in planning and solving problems dealing with decision making process, the irrational manager never involved and communicated with subordinates at all.

Key words: *Information and Library Managers; management; service*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas pentingnya pengambilan keputusan yang dilakukan oleh Manajer Perpustakaan dan Informasi. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi dokumen dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pengambilan keputusan untuk Manajer Perpustakaan dan Informasi merupakan fungsi penting dalam mengelola layanan informasi dan perpustakaan. Ini adalah tugas utama Manajer Perpustakaan dan Informasi, karena setiap fungsi manajemen, sebuah perpustakaan membutuhkan keputusan untuk diterapkan. Ini melibatkan tahapan proses pengambilan keputusan, seperti mendefinisikan tujuan, mengumpulkan informasi, memilih dan mendiskusikan alternatif, menerapkan keputusan, mendelegasikan pekerjaan, dan mengevaluasinya kemudian. Selanjutnya, ada dua jenis Manajer Perpustakaan dan Informasi, manajer rasional dan irasional. Manajer rasional bekerja dengan bawahan mereka dalam kelompok, pengambilan keputusan didelegasikan pada bawahan, pengambilan keputusan didasarkan pada diskusi bawahan, dan keputusan akhir ditentukan oleh bawahan. Di sisi lain, dalam merencanakan dan memecahkan masalah yang berkaitan dengan proses pengambilan keputusan, manajer yang irasional tidak pernah melibatkan dan berkomunikasi dengan para bawahannya sama sekali.

Kata-kata kunci: *Manajer Perpustakaan dan Informasi; manajemen; layanan*

1. Introduction

In daily routine, Information and Library Managers have to make decisions for what to do and what not to do for his subordinates. The decisions they make can range from the least importance to the most one, depending very much on what those people are, what they need what kind of problems they have to overcome, how much the finance is available, and how the effects of the decisions may arise. This is usually called the scale of priority. In an organization, managers with managerial roles are expected to make decisions as an important part of their responsibilities.

The writer is concerned with the managerial decision making, that is to analyze a premise that says : "Decision making is the primary task for managers". Based on that promise, the following discusses the

importance of decision making for Information and Library Managers, and the examples of its application.

2. The Influence of Decision Made

Management is a process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals work together in groups efficiently to accomplish certain goals (Koontz and Weihrich, 1990:4). The main tasks of every manager are to design and maintain an internal environment in which a group of people can work in mutual help efficiently for the achievement of the organization goals. To run his organization and to achieve the goals, managers must work consistently through the five managerial functions: planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and coordinating (POSLOC) (Koontz and Weihrich, 1990: 4).

Concerning the functions of management, managers can be categorized into three levels: top, middle, and lower managers (Dale, 1978: 8-11). Top managers are managers who set the goals for the whole organization and approve all major changes. They are a decision maker. Middle managers are a diverse group that may include sales managers, personnel managers, and the heads of many different departments. Lower managers are managers who directly supervise the rank and file employees.

Another important point that is expressed in the definition is that managers, mainly work within a group of people. This means that they can be influenced by people as well as they influence them. In other words, managers must communicate to their people. Furthermore,, in relation with the designing and maintaining a healthy and internal environment for the effective working performance of every member working together in a group, the manager's most important task is to make every member in the organization understand the group's purposes and objectives and the techniques used to achieve them. To this point, people who carry out managerial functions are not only called managers, but they are also called designers and communicators in their own organizations. Of course, in order to be effective and productive in carrying out their tasks, managers must make plans as a frame work. For this reason, they also must identify the priorities to do and decide how to deal with the subordinates, what methods or techniques used, who are going to be in charge, when, etc. Thus in this position they are decision makers.

Decision making is considered to be very difficult task of an Information and Library managers. It does not only demand a lot of time and energy, but also it requires intelligent skill and sufficient knowledge in unlimited scope of jobs. Once managers make a wrong decision, this decision can cause loss or waste of money. A university library manager, for example, after discussing with his staff, had decided to buy some units of photocopier machines which are hoped to generate the income of the library. By reason of not having enough money for buying photocopier machines with high quality, the manager bought some units of photocopier machines with poor quality instead. What happened after a few months before those machines could cover the price they had spent? Because of the poor quality, the machines were broken soon afterwards. Consequently, the library should spend a lot of money to repair them. Thus, those machines did not generate income instead of wasting more money to repair had made. He might see the need for photocopier service, as well as the opportunity to generate the library income, but he did not

see the effect of those inferior photocopy machines to the whole library service.

Whenever managers make a wrong decision on his managerial tasks, it will surely result in losses and waste of time, or even can cause a disaster for an organization. However, there is something more important behind the decision making itself, that is, the process of decision making. It involves how to find out the real source of the problem not the ways of solving the main problem and then discuss them with the staff, etc. These are the main and important tasks of the managers in any level and in any kinds of organization, such as a faculty or a university.

Right or wrong managerial decision making in an organization affects many people, and the system within the organization in particular and the others involved in general. Consequently, an accurate decision making does not only require physical facilities, such as information sources and information technology, but also intellectual ability, such as knowledge or experiences and skills in a wide range of fields. Therefore, to get an accurate and important decision, managers must consider at least the nature of decision making and rational decision making.

3. The Nature of Decision Making

Decision making can be defined as selecting a set of actions from alternative proposed : it is at the core of planning. A plan cannot be said to exist unless a decision - a commitment of resources, direction, or reputation has been made. Until this point, there are only planning studies and analyses. Managers sometimes see decision making as their central job because they must constantly choose what to do, who are going to do, and when, where, and even how the decision will be carried out. Decision making is, however, only a step in planning (Koontz and Weihrich, 1990: 108).

Decision making according to this definition, is a selection of a course of action from among alternatives. This means that the decision making does not emerge from nothing- It is a kind of agreement which develops from the process of consideration, identification, analysis of many alternatives on their positive and negative aspects. This process can be done through the act of comparing, and weighing, facts, ideas of people, and other additional information from many kinds of sources by utilizing critical, analytical, and logical point of views. Managers sometimes see that the decision making is their central activity as they constantly make decisions throughout their tasks.

Peter Drucker states that a decision is a judgment or a choice between alternatives. He feels that decision making is synonymous with management. Actual selection from among alternatives is the core of planning. Whatever it is, he does through decision making. Those decisions may be made as a matter of routine. Indeed, he may not even realize that he is making them, or they may affect the future existence of the enterprise and require years of systematic analysis. Thus, management always involves a decision making process (Ching-Chih, 1980: 31).

Decision making is a complicated process dealing with the selection of a course of action from amongst alternatives. Before making decision, an IL manager should premise the nature of situation or problem and should identify the alternatives. In addition, the alternatives should be evaluated in order to

be objective.

According to Kepner and Tragoe quoted by Evans, (Evans 1983: 116-117), there are seven stages of process of logical decision making. Firstly, managers should search for and define the important organizational objectives that are relevant to the problem. Secondly, managers should classify these objectives according to their relative importance. Thirdly, managers should search for and define all the feasible methods of solving the problem. Fourthly, after evaluating the alternatives of solution, managers should select the one(s) to be implemented. Sixthly, managers should explore the consequences of the tentative choice, particularly the adverse ones. Finally, managers should determine how to head off adverse effects.

Furthermore, Sargent classifies a framework for taking and implementing decision into five steps: considering, consulting, deciding, communicating, and checking (Sargent, 1976: 8-9). The first step is the preparation step at which managers consider as the problem. In this case, the problem should be clarified by checking for the cause or effect and be sure it is their own decision to take. Ultimate objective, time, and other constraints should be clarified as well. Thus, managers have to decide what information is really needed. The second step is to consult the other people. In this step, managers should make maximum amount of information available. In other words, they have to collect the facts relating to the problems. In this stage, it is necessary to take the initiative to involve those affected. The third step is consultation in order to get some options. Based on the real problem and think whether or not the decision can be implemented. If it can be implemented, the implemented plan should be written down. The fourth step, managers has to explain what decision has been decided, what will happen, why, and to whom it will affect. The decision must be informed to the subordinates. To be remembered, a briefing in group should be given. It is not effective to give briefing individually, but in group. Managers should ensure that everyone understands when the decision will be implemented. The final step, managers should check what happens after putting the decision into effect, whether or not it will positively affect everyone and everything in the organization. Thus, the decision needs to be reviewed and corrected if necessary. If something wrong happens, a correction should be made.

Generally the process of decision making consists of analyzing problems, identifying alternative solutions, selecting the best solution, implementing it, and evaluating the results. Undoubtedly. an organization usually faces problems, either a few or many, in its activities. It may have difficulties or handicaps in its efforts. Therefore, Information Library managers are required to make decisions in order to overcome the problems. Thei success largely depend on their decisions.

Dealing with a good decision, there are some questions that must be considered by a manager, as follows:

1. What relationship should I try to maintain with my subordinates and my boss?
2. Is everyone clear about the aims we are trying to achieve? Am I myself?
3. What should I delegate and how far can I involve my people?
4. Are working conditions conducive to good morale?

5. Are there any risks to health or safety?
6. How good are the morale and discipline in my area?
7. What am I doing to develop my own competence as a leader?
8. Etc.

4. An Example of Decision Making Process

There are two samples given below concerning the decision making. The first sample represents a poor decision making, while the second one represents a good or rational decision one.

The following sample might be the consequence of a poor decision making in a large state university library dated back to the middle last century (Lowell, 1975: 121-123). The library system consisted of nine branches which served department of professional schools and a large central library built in the last ten years. It had a total staff numbered three hundred members, one third of them had academic qualification. For some reasons, the senior staff members happened to write their concerns to be presented to the administrative staff of the state library. The note is as follows :

To the Administrative Staff of the State University Library:

We, the undersigned senior staff members, wish to convey to you our deep concerns about the overall administration of this library system. Although we have not conducted a survey of all senior staff members, we believe this paper represents a consensus of their opinion as well as ours. This knowledge has come from two sources: 1. The informal flow of information gained in day-to-day activities, and 2. opinion expressed during several meetings of few senior staff members. We wish to emphasize that we are acting in good faith and from sincere dedication to the professional service of the highest caliber. We have no interest in blaming individuals but we are concerned about some aspects about overall administration of the libraries which we believe, if not corrected, will lead to the deterioration of staff morale on library service.

Because you do not provide us with the necessary direction and leadership, we feel handicapped in fulfilling our professional obligation which is to provide library materials, we cite the following deficiencies in your administration-

1. You have not communicated to the staff clearly defined objectives, priorities, and policies; in fact, this appears to shift from day and situation to situation. Many of your decisions seem to be made to take immediate care of crises instead of being based on overall system wide goals and policies.
2. You do not appear to take time to give serious operating problems sufficient study. Are you spreading your interest and energies too widely? Or should you make more use of delegation?
3. You frequently fail to look at the effect of a decision on the whole system- The management techniques seem to solve isolated small problems without relating them to the total system and without looking for the causes.
4. Problems brought to you through the usual channels are frequently ignored or you appear to reject any responsibilities for facing them.
5. There seem to be conflicts in the delegation of authority and responsibility. We suggest that you study the overall organization, structure and chain command.
6. Job applicants should be screened more carefully. Frequently persons are appointed who are not fully qualified or the vacancies. Is this the result of failure on you part to recognize the need for certain professional skills in given positions or insufficient knowledge about how and where to search for qualified personnel?
7. We believe many of your responsibilities could be delegated to staff communities which would give your more time overall thinking and planning and would put more decision making at the lower level of the organization.

Signed'

(Lowell, 1975: 121-123)

The case presented above suggests clearly that the administrator of the library had realized his primary main task, decision making in the light of his central position. However, in most of the point of the letter, he made irrational decisions. In point one, his decision is not a problem solving- It is a more curative, rather than preventive action. There is no effort in analyzing the problem, stated at point number two. Because the decision was made without proper plan, it might have bad effect to other systems in the library service, suggested in point number three.

In this context, the management tasks were not carried out properly. He might have over stressed in one aspect of managerial task, and neglected many other important tasks. There was no clear limitation of authority and responsibility of the staff, so that the delegation he made seems to be confusing, as at point number five. In addition, he underestimated the staffing task. He did not appreciate the need for certain professional skills, so that job applicants were not screened with care. This resulted in less qualified staff, as expressed in point number six.

Moreover, because he felt that he had the central position, he understood that he was the only one who had the authority to make decision. He seemed to handle all of the responsibilities in the library policy. He had never delegated some of his duties to his staff so he hardly had his time to think about planning.

At last, he did not communicate the objectives of the service to the staff. It means he never let his staff know what he wanted them to accomplish as presented on point number one.

In contrast, the rational decision making is produced through rational process of thinking. The basic processes of decision making are premising, identifying the alternatives, evaluating the alternatives and making decision. The following is an example of strategic decision making process happened at Bryn Thomas Memorial Library of the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, where the writer had carried out his field work in January 1994.

In July 1993, Bryn Thomas Memorial Library of the Royal Berkshire Hospital planned to have an automated system. For This reason, the Principal librarian had to work very hard. The first step, she held a big meeting with all of the staff members. Deputy Librarian. Senior librarians, Assistant Librarian, and the Director of the hospital. In this meeting, the Principal Librarian let everyone know all about the plan and its objectives openly. Every member could give any comments or suggestions about the plan. From this meeting the Principal librarian had gathered much information, particularly from the Deputy librarian, and from the Senior librarians with computer qualification. All of the information and suggestions will be taken into consideration.

The next step is that the Principal librarian. Deputy Librarian, Senior Librarian, and librarians with

computer qualification formed a kind of committee. It was called Computer Advisory Group, The Deputy Librarian was assigned to lead the committee in collecting data about the current position of the library, such as financial condition, total number of staff, the number of student including outside users, total number of collection, spaces in the library and the projection of the library development in next ten years. These data were very important for the committee as well for the computer suppliers to figure out the exact computer systems to be applied.

After all the data about the library collected and analyzed, the committee should gather important information about the computer suppliers, and the systems they provide. To get more realistic application of the computer system for library use, the Principal Librarians and the committee had to learn experiences from other libraries in Reading. Having learned all of the data about the computer information, the committee identified the criteria of the computer systems to be applied. These are:

1. The facilities

- a. The new system must be able to cope with the all existing files*
- b. The system must be able to accept records in MARC format from outside sources including CD-ROMs.
- c. It is desirable that the system will be able to transfer data to and from the Institute's Oracle based management information system.
- d. It is desirable that the system be compatible with the Institute's existing telephone system (GPT ISDx) and computer network.

2. Backup, security, and maintenance system.

- a. Suppliers should state guaranteed response time for each module, and whether these are adversely affected by increasing volume of use, and by growth in the size of file.
- b. Agreement for preventive maintenance should be specified, with an estimate of down time. It should be possible for the Institute to timetable such maintenance for busy times or for outside library opening hours-
- c. Any limit on period of years or which the system will be maintained must be specified, along with annual cost.

3. Emergency Procedures

A clear statement procedures to be used in the event of system or power failure is required.

4. Staff Training

- a. Adequate initial training must be provided for the library and the computer staff. Suppliers should indicate the duration, nature and cost of such training.
- b. Suppliers should specify the degree of involvement, if any, required for computer specialist.

5. Demonstration of system

Suppliers should be prepared to give online demonstration of their system, and to submit a list of sites where it may be seen in operation.

6. Acquisition module

- a. The system should be integrated with cataloguing, circulation and OPAC modules.
- b. It should be possible to order all library materials, including books, audio visual materials, and all other library supplies (e.g. stationery, computer supplies, etc.).
- c. It must be possible to download data from external databases, including CD-ROM.

All of the data were sent to the computer suppliers. After that, there were five systems demonstrated to the library- These systems were Fretwell Downing (Oracle), Urica, Bookshelf, CLSI, and Dynic. After getting all data about these systems, including their facilities, the library manager held a meeting within the committee to discuss about *the* strengths and the weaknesses including the price of the system. In January 1993, after a deliberate discussion comparing these five systems point by point, on their strengths and weaknesses against the list of selection drawn up at the last meeting, the committee decided two systems to be applied in the library, They were Dynic and CLSI.

From this process of decision making, it can be found that the decision making is a very difficult task. The library manager (the Principle library) hardly worked in her own, she almost worked with her staff within a group. The library manager together with the committee, spent seven months to come to the final decision. Again, the decision was not the Principal librarian's decision but the decision of the whole library personnel.

5. Conclusion

Basically, decision making is the process of how to select the best choice among alternatives- In term of management, decision making is an essential function, so it can be said that managers is a decision maker. In other words, decision making is the primary task of managers, since every function of management needs a decision to be applied- This may lead to the future success or bankruptcy of the organizations they manage. However, there is still one more important thing than decision making itself, that is, the process (the ways or techniques) used to come to the decision. It involves the stages of decision making process, such as defining objectives, collecting information, choosing and discussing alternatives, implementing decision, delegating jobs, and evaluating it. In the case of sample one, it is clear that the task decision making was really done by a single authority. The decision was taken without considering it effects to the whole system in the organization. The managers did not communicate with their subordinates. There was also no delegation in decision making. On the other hand, the case of sample two showed a democratic decision making. To carry out her managerial tasks, the managers really worked with their subordinates in group. They delegated to their subordinates, and the final decision belonged to the subordinates.

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