

The Analysis of Variability of the Importance of Information in a Decision Process Regarding Other People

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SUMMARY: *The variability of the importance of information is determined by many factors. The research was a trial to indicate the variables which determinate the change of the importance of information. The basic factor which creates the importance of information is the kind of the decision which contains this information. It means that decisions, which are significant because of their interpersonal values or their professional values are made considering different information. The fact of making decisions itself increases the importance of negative information no matter what the character of the decision is. People who have to make a choice consider the negative information rather than positive ones. The investigation also proved the dependance of the importance of information on its affective value and on importance and affective values of information which appear in configuration with given information.*

Introduction

Making a decision is an activity of making choice of an action from a set of possible actions (Kozielecki, 1977; Tyszka 1986). The process of making a decision is preceded by a predecisional process in which a deciding person measures the utility of this activity, it's results and it's subjective probability (Kozielecki, 1977). In a decision process a person chooses an action; in other words a person evaluates attractiveness of particular actions and accepts the most attractive of them. Decision maker creates an imaginary scenario with all probable consequences to other alternative decisions, and then chooses the most attractive scenario. The strategies used here (present and perspective strategies, algorithms, heuristic) are set of rules, combinations of utility and subjective probability, for example the strategy of subjectively expected utility (SEU), which lets us choose the best action (Lindsay, Norman, 1972).

A person making certain decision has to disposal a set of information concerning alternative solutions of given decisive action. If the decision concerns a choice of a partner in life, the information about candidates' features would be useful, as well as, their attractiveness for the person making decision, subjective utility to accept or refuse each of them, subjective probability to make oneself liked, etc.

The optimal decision would be the choice of a candidate who has the greatest psychological value for a person making the decision. It means that a person making the decision has to measure the attractiveness of each candidate. This is the process of measuring or in other words forming the attitude towards each of the candidates (Skarżyńska, 1981; Czapiński, 1984). The criteria of evaluation are: the power and the kind of motivation (Kozielecki, 1977). The evaluation is usually multidimensional. We ask a question if our candidate is a friend, beloved person, the one with whom we want to bring up children, a partner to talk, to have fun with, work, sexual partner, etc. Nonetheless, a person making the decision makes the general evaluation of a candidate.

It has to be considered how the process of creating attitude towards the other person occurs, what it depends on, and how it influences the decisions. Does a person evaluate others in a posteriori way, after analyzing information, does he formulate the final global evaluation? Is the process of evaluation dominated by a cognitive reactions of evaluating person? Do we evaluate in a prioric way, when the primary affective reaction to the other person determinists the global value? (Wojciszke, 1991). There is also a question if the global value is the result of integration of all partial values, or if it is identical with one, but significant value of any feature of another person, for a decision maker.

We can also think about the way of combining information, influence of: their importance, their affective and descriptive meaning, and their configuration, for the global estimation. The kind of problems were carefully analyzed also in Norman Anderson's theory of information integrating. According to Anderson's (Wojciszke 1991), the subject makes the general evaluation in two steps. During the first step he grades particular information - he evaluates particular elements of information separately. During the second step he integrates partial values according to an algebraic rule into a complete image of a person. Each information is evaluated in two independent aspects: considering its affective value and importance. According to the author the importance of information describes an influence of that information on the general evaluation in comparison with other information.

We can try to give the answer for the question about the influence of an opinion about the other person for the decision concerning that person, or turn back the relation and ask about the influence of the character of the decision for evaluating other persons' features.

The aim of presented research project was to find the answers for two questions. The first of them was if the importance of information changes depends on other information. That is, if the importance of information itself is different from the importance of information which comes together with other information. This problem includes question how the importance of information depends on its affective value and the importance and affective value of other information which come together.

The second question was, whether the importance of information depends on the character of the decision which a man takes using also this kind of information. Decisions which have been researched concerned other people and were important for them because of their social and professional value.

It has been predicted that:

hypothesis 1 - the importance of the information will change when we put it together with others (the importance of the positive affective value information will decrease in presence of the negative affective value information and the importance of the negative affective value information will decrease in presence of the positive affective value information), hypothesis 2 - the decisions which are important to the subject because of their interpersonal values and the decisions which are important because of their instrumental values, the subject makes considering different information. It means that the kind of decision influences the change of the importance of information (also influences the selection of information which are the criteria of the decision).

Method

1. The characteristic of the introductory research

The introductory research has been conducted in two steps. The aim of the first one was to choose a career having the biggest instrumental value in public opinion. The subjects were asked about choosing one of the four professions: a doctor, a plumber, a lawyer and foreign language teacher (according to one of four critical situations: broken leg, flooded apartment, crime, and a difficult exam), and which of them they would demand the most professional skills. The investigation showed that the occupation of the greatest instrumental value is the occupation of a doctor. As a person of the greatest interpersonal value I chose the partner arbitrarily.

The second step of research was to answer the question if "Adjective Checklist Describing Human Characteristics" written by Maria Lewicka (1979) includes features which may characterize a person interpersonally and professionally capable or not, and answer if the value given to particular features differ in both cases. In order to get the answer to those question I asked examined person to grade the level of importance, in case of a doctor and a partner, the thirty adjectives (ten important

positive, ten important negative and ten unimportant) chosen from the list by Maria Lewicka.

The research proved that the list of adjectives by Maria Lewicka includes the important features for both: a doctor and a partner, and that their importance, meaning the sequence of adjectives in case of a doctor is different than their sequence in case of a partner and also different than sequence on the list by M. Lewicka.

Introductory investigation allowed to use the features from the list by M. Lewicka in basic research, thanks to discovering different criteria of evaluating the role of a doctor and a partner, and treating these two social positions as representing the highest interpersonal and instrumental values.

2. The characteristic of the basic research

Thirty students of both sexes were surveyed including fourteen female and sixteen male, from different academies and departments (the University of Poznań, the University of Toruń, Engineering College of Poznań, Medical Academy of Bydgoszcz).

The aim of research was to construct a list describing a doctor's features and a list describing partner's features. In both lists the features were set up in order to their affective meaning in case of a doctor or in case of a partner, in the given sequence: from the necessary through neutral to undesired. The position of a given adjective on the list was delimited by the value of the median of the grade which the adjective got from the surveyed people.

The identical procedure was used as in the introductory research. This time larger number of adjectives describing human's features, a set of 260 adjectives (the whole Lewicka's list) was used. Surveyed persons got a set of 260 adjectives and they were asked to systemize them in the sequence of their importance for the profession of a doctor and sequence of their importance for a partner. The adjectives were written on slips of paper which subjective people put into number and described boxes. The boxes were described in points from "- 4 unwanted feature", through "0 neutral feature", to "+ 4 necessary feature". Boxes were arranged in the sequence from -4 to +4, but the slips of paper were all mixed together.

The instruction was: "sort given features to boxes according to what you decide of their importance in the profession of a doctor/a partner". The lists which came from the first research were used to make a descriptions of a doctor and a partner which are combined of important and unimportant positive features and also important and unimportant negative features. These characteristics were showed in the second stage of the research.

Twelve descriptions were made: six descriptions of a doctor, and six of a partner. Each of these descriptions contained six features: two descriptions consisted of three important positive features and three unimportant negative features. Two

next descriptions consisted of three important negative and unimportant positive features. One description consisted of three important positive and three unimportant positive features, the last description consisted of three important negative and three unimportant negative features. Features were important and unimportant in the same level, it means they had adequately equal value, with consideration of the negative displacement (Prentka, 1992).

The research was conducted like that: people taking part in the experiment got the descriptions of persons (a doctor and a partner) which consisted of adjectives from the lists which were made in the first stage of the experiment. Subjects were asked to accept or refuse the described person as a doctor or a partner. The choice they made by the binary choice method (Yes, No). The instruction was: "Imagine a person who is.....(the adjectives). Could this person be your doctor/your partner?"

The characteristics of a partner in life contained the following features :

- characteristic No.1: sensitive, jealous, loyal, strict, faithful, stubborn
- characteristic No.2: nonconformist, intolerant, nonconventional, egoist, clever, lazy
- characteristic No.3: intelligent, good educated, unquiet, shy, submissive, tolerant
- characteristic No.4: fanatic, arrogant, unpretentious, generous, overintellectualized, poseur
- characteristic No. 5 : sensitive, loyal, fanatic, faithful, generous, unpretentious
- characteristic No. 6 : intolerant, egoist, lazy, ,jealous, strict, stubborn.

The characteristic of a doctor contained the following adjectives :

- characteristic No.1: precise, patient, foreseeing, laconic, puritan, gloomy
- characteristic No.2: sensitive, spontaneous, aggressive, arrogant, fanatic, simpleton
- characteristic No. 3: objective, ruthless, eventempered, slow, self-controlled, resistible
- characteristic No.4: smart, quick, effective leader, successful, cowman, double-faced
- characteristic No.5: precise, patient, foreseeing, smart, quick, successful leader
- characteristic No.6: aggressive, arrogant, simpleton, ruthless, slow, self- controlled.

Results

The results of making decisions concerning the choices of a partner in life and a doctor are presented in Table I.

In case of a profession of a doctor as well as in case of a partner, subjects mostly accepted descriptions, which consisted of important positive, unimportant negative and important positive, unimportant positive features. They mostly refused descriptions consisted of important negative, unimportant positive and important negative, unimportant negative features. Generally speaking, ss put their attention to the important positive or negative features.

Table 1.

Number of characteristic	The choices of a partner		The choices of a doctor	
	DECISIONS		DECISIONS	
	acceptation	refusal	acceptation	refusal
1.	17	13	19	11
2.	21	09	22	08
3.	03	27	01	29
4.	00	30	03	27
5.	28	02	29	01
6.	01	29	00	30
	$\Sigma=70$	$\Sigma=110$		$\Sigma=106$

However, the total number of refusals in case of a partner 110 and 106 in case of a doctor, prevailed the total number of acceptance: 70 in case of a partner and 74 in case of a doctor. It should be emphasized that according to the instructions, ss were not obliged to choose one person, they could accepted a free number of them.

It has been assumed that in making the characteristics from the specific combination of the importance of information and affective values if any particular description contained a proper number of important positive features, a person should have accepted the candidate as a partner or a doctor. If a candidate was refused it would mean that unimportant negative features influenced the decision, reducing positive information weight or changing their affective value. It could also mean the increase of negative information weight.

In the characteristic, which contained important negative and unimportant positive features it has been assumed that a person should refuse those characteristics. But if a person accepted such a characteristic it would mean that unimportant positive features can influence the decision even in presence of important negative features.

The difference of number concerning choices of a partner and choices of a doctor, made by the subjects between a characteristic consisted of significant negative, not significant positive features and a characteristic consisted of negative features, has been using t-Student test statistically not significant on the level $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore it can be said, that despite of presence of positive features, ss refused characteristics of a partner and a doctor, or that the positive features had less impact on the decision.

The difference of choices concerning a partner and a doctor, basing on the characteristic containing significant positive, not significant negative features and the characteristic containing only positive features (significant and not significant), has been statistically significant on the level $\alpha = 0.01$. It means that number of refusals was greater although the positive features have been significant and the negative

have not been significant. Therefore the negative features had a great impact on the decision.

The analysis proved that not significant negative features could suppress the influence of the significant positive features and the people who made decision refused the candidate as a doctor or a partner in the statistically significant proportion. It can be said that the significant positive features could not influence the decision, which contained even not significant, but negative features. The conclusion is that the negative information have greater influence on making decision than positive information.

The last problem I considered was to find the difference and similarities between the process of making interpersonally significant decision and the process of making instrumentally significant decision.

My investigation did not show any significant difference in general rules of making both kinds of decisions. Total number of acceptance of a partner (which is 49), which was analyzed using t-Student test, did not differ in a statistically significant way on the level $\alpha=0.2$ from the total number of acceptance of a doctor (which is 51). Also the difference between choices based upon characteristic containing significant positive, not significant negative features (similar values were 19 and 20), significant positive, not significant negative features (similar values 1 and 2), significant positive, not significant positive features (similar values 28 and 29) and significant negative, not significant negative features (similar values 1 and 0), were statistically not significant on the level $\alpha= 0.2$.

If, from the character of the decision (acceptation or refusal) we can imply about the material (information) on basic of which the decision was made, we can state that the rules of integrating information (positive, negative, significant, not significant) do not differ in the case of interpersonally and instrumentally significant decisions.

Considering the whole process of making a decision it can be worth to remind that the first part of research showed the dissimilarity of giving affective meaning to information in the case of the decision regarding a doctor and in the case of the decision regarding a partner in life. Subjects gave different affective meaning to different descriptive adjectives.

Conclusions

The results of the presented data analysis suggest that:

1. People making decision consider the whole configuration of information, not the particular information.
2. The importance of positive information decreases in presence of negative information.

3. The importance of essential negative information does not change under the influence of positive information.
4. People who have to make a choice, consider the negative information rather than positive. Looking for a doctor or a partner in life, we try to find a person who has the less faults, it does not mean that we do not consider positive features, e.g. we look for a doctor who is good, not bad, or we are interested in the partner of interaction because the person is smart (nice) not silly (ugly).
5. The activity of making a decision probably causes the increase of the importance of negative information. It means, that declared significance of an information without any context is something different to its authentic influence on the decision. We are more tolerant while making decision which does not relate to us. But when we make a decision which does relate to ourselves - the significance of negative information increases.
6. The kind of decision influences the change of importance of information, it means that decisions, which are significant because of their interpersonal values and significant because of their instrumental values, are made considering many different information.
7. The particular importance of information (positive and negative) is connected with the intensity of affective value.
8. Information which are extremely positive or extremely negative influence the decision more than average information (extreme effect).
9. Negative information influence the global value more than positive of the same intensity (negativity-effect).
10. In people's decisions there are more refusals than acceptation, what seems to be natural, because we make one choice of a partner in life and one choice of a doctor from many other possibilities.

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