

# Decisional profiles of brazilian, french and american managers

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## □ Abstract

This paper presents the main results from an exploratory study whose goal was to identify the individual perception on the decision-making process, ascertaining how the variable national culture influences such perception. The methodology used was that of a survey. A comparative study was conducted among Brazil, France and USA. The data were collected through a set of 5 instruments of quantitative and qualitative nature, with a non-probabilistic sample of 285 people (approximately 100 individuals in each one of the 3 countries). The present work highlights the results achieved in the exploration of the variable national culture versus decisional perception, emphasizing the methodology and the process of analysis for the qualitative data. As main result, different decisional profiles were outlined according to national culture, comparing the different perceptions by Brazilians, French and Americans.

**Key-words:** decisional profiles, decision-making, national culture

## □ Résumé

Ce papier présente les principaux résultats d'une étude exploratoire dont le but était d'identifier la perception individuelle sur le processus de prise de décision managériale, tout en vérifiant le rôle de la variable culture nationale. La méthode utilisée a été une enquête comparative réalisée au Brésil, en France et aux EUA. Pour la collecte de données, un ensemble de 5 instruments ont été utilisés, de nature qualitative et quantitative, ceci avec un échantillon non-probabilistic de 285 cadres (environ 100 individus en chaque des 3 pays). Ce papier présente les résultats de cette analyse, tout comme la méthode d'analyse des données qualitatives. Des différents profils de la variable culture nationale, ceci permettant de dégager les similarités et les différences entre les brésiliens, les français et les américains.

**Mot-clés:** profil des décideurs, prise de décision, culture nationale

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## Introduction <sup>i</sup>

Currently, the resources of Information Technology have made the interaction, co-operation and negotiation among people and organizations possible in almost the whole world. However, the knowledge on the technological tools that allow such operations is not enough, as it's necessary to know the human, behavioral and cultural aspects involved in these interaction processes (Ein-Dor et al, 1993; Graham et al, 1994).

Thus, bringing to the field of information systems the concern with the pursuit of knowledge on behavioral issues has become a necessary challenge, as necessary as the pursuit of interdisciplinarity, which enables understanding the diverse aspects involving the use of Information Technology and Information Systems.

Within this topic, it's been found that the forms of communication and negotiation, as well as perceptions, ways of behaving, attitudes and decision-making styles, range according to the cultural basis considered. This article refers to a survey whose goal was to identify the individual perception on the decision-making process, ascertaining how the variables national culture and decisional experience influence this perception.

The purpose of this work is to expose the results found through the aforementioned survey, emphasizing those directly related to the exploration of the influence of national culture on the decisional perception. The methodology and process of analysis of the qualitative data are highlighted, in order to contribute to all those who face the challenge of working on "unstructured" data, since we treated qualitative data from different languages and cultures.

The article is organized as follows: firstly, the main theoretical basis adopted is exposed (section 2), as well the survey methodology (section 3). Next, we proceed on to the presentation of the analysis of the qualitative data, showing the results obtained (section 4). Main results achieved are shown in section 5 with decisional profiles outlined, comparing Brazilians, French and Americans.

## 1. Theoretical basis

To study the decision-making process, we took as basis for comparison Simon's (1947) decision-making process model, based on his "theory of bounded rationality". A number of authors deal with the decision-making process; however, we used Simon's model as a reference for judging that he describes in an accessible and didactic fashion the main phases of the decision-making process. For further information on this topic also see: Anastassopoulos et al. (1991); Cohen, March and Olsen (1972); Elster (1988); Jarrosson (1994); March and Olsen (1976); and Mintzberg et al.(1976).

As for national culture, we chose as basic reference the work by Geer Hofstede, a Dutch author who is largely referred to in international literature on this topic. Hofstede carried out studies during a long period with divisions of the IBM in roughly 64 countries on the differences of values as part of a national culture. Other authors also addressed this topic: Triandis (1982); Erez and Earley (1993); Baligh (1994); Ein-dor et al. (1993); Glenn (1981); Graham, Mintu and Rodgers (1994); also see Hofstede (1991).

## 2. Research Method

The adopted survey is of a cross-sectional, exploratory nature. The sampling unit is the individual. Considering that all individuals are decision-makers, for the study goals the target population chosen was those decision-makers involved in business, commercial or administrative (practical and educational) activities. In this group are included: managers, company executives and management students. The method adopted for choosing the sample was the non-probabilistic by convenience. The sample was selected by the criterion of accessibility, considering that the responders to whom the survey was applied could be contacted rather easily, given the educational activities of the project researchers. Thus, it must be stressed that their representativeness in relation to the population could not be completely ascertained. The sample is comprised by two types of responders: academic – group made up by undergraduate, master's degree and doctorate students of Management courses – corresponding to 4% of the final sample; and managers/executives – group consisting of individuals that work in organizations as decision-makers – corresponding to 96% of the sample. For data collection, we counted on a questionnaire made up by 5 differentiated instruments. Here is a brief description thereof:

- **Instrument 1-Word association:** in this instrument the responders mentioned spontaneously the verbs, adjectives and nouns that they relate with the decision-making topic.
- **Instrument 2- Composition of sentences:** The following question was posed to the responder: "We'd like you to tell us in a few lines about a decision you've made. It can be both a personal and professional decision".
- **Instrument 3 – Case:** consisted of an instrument that placed the respondent facing a certain decision-making situation. To do so, they were required to place themselves in a decision-maker's shoes.
- **Instrument 4 – Cultural-decisional scale:** instrument comprising a 27-question questionnaire (in scales of 5 points), in which views on culture, decision-making process and decision-making experience were implied.
- **Instrument 5 – Socio-demographic scale:** instrument comprising a 21-question questionnaire (age, gender, education, languages, etc.), data inherent to the decision-makers and the organizations to which they're linked.

As for the composition of the sample utilized, this was made up by 285 responders from Brazil, France and USA, distributed as follows: 103 responders in Brazil, 102 in France, and 80 in the USA. The data were collected in the following cities: In Brazil: Aracaju, Porto Alegre, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo; and a random subsample from cities in Rio Grande do Sul's interior (different regions of the state – 22 responders). In France: Annecy and Grenoble. In the USA: Baltimore (Maryland), Washington D.C., and Tuscaloosa (Alabama).

As for the **socio-demographic profile of the sample**, table 1 attempts to show the main characteristics investigated: most are males (64%), and also most have got grad degrees (96%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the sample

Characteristics	Socio-demographic profile	Differences between countries
Age	Mean age 30 years	The Brazilians show the highest mean age (33 years) ; the Americans the lowest one (28 years)
Time at job	11 years on average	The Brazilians have the longest mean time at job (14 years) ; the Americans have the shortest one (9 years).
Management experience time	6 years on average	France has the highest mean management experience time (8 years) ; the USA has the lowest one (4 years).

### 3. Qualitative analysis and results

The results are shown along with a description of the process of analysis, which helps unveil how rich the use of qualitative data can be.

#### 3.1 Analyzing decision-making related words

For the analysis of the qualitative data, the first challenge to face is the suitable codification of information. According to Hoslti (apud Richardson et al., 1985), “codification is the process by which raw data are systematically transformed and sorted in units that allow an exact description of the relevant characteristics of the content”. For categorizing the words (verbs, adjectives, nouns) related to decision (research instrument 1), a lexical analysis was conducted, which, according to Bardin (1977), can be defined as the classification and thorough accounting of frequencies of a vocabulary. Lexical analysis is a type of analysis that can be carried out within the context of an analysis of content: the words, according to their meaning, are sorted in categories in order to subsequently calculate the incidence of each one of these categories.

The words were analyzed by a committee formed by three members of the research staff, two of them having lived in the USA (one of them for 4 years, the other one for 1 year), while one of them lived in France for 4 years. The staff

members analyzed the data individually. Using words printed on stickers, each one, separately, sorted the words perceived as common, creating categories for each one of the word groups (verbs, adjectives, nouns) related to decision-making. The investigators received sheets for word categorization. In the space below the name of each country, the words belonging to a certain category were fixed, considering the language and vocabulary of each country.

After each investigator had made their classifications separately, the staff held a meeting and discussed about every word group, and categories were formed within each group. Several categories were common under the point of view of each investigator. In the event of disagreement, that is, different categories, these were discussed, with every staff member arguing and arriving at the final categories by consensus. It must be mentioned that each category was based on the most mentioned words.

As for the time devoted to analyses, the individual analysis of each one of the 3 word groups (verbs, adjectives and nouns) took 5 hours on average. For the collective analysis (to arrive at a consensus over each one of the 3 groups), 2 meetings were held for about 4 hours each. The analysis comprised a total of approximately 23 working hours for each investigator, 8 hours of these spent on collective work. Each classification by word group (verbs, adjectives, nouns) was performed separately, that is, there was no attempt to forcibly use the same categories for each group, although each of the 3 groups had common categories among one another, given the nature of the words described by the responders. For the creation of every category in each word group, it was attempted to observe a few basic rules pointed out by Bardin (1977).

From the definition of categories, dictionaries for each word group (verbs, adjectives and nouns) were organized. With this, using a statistic software (Freitas and Moscarola, 2000), a closed multiple variable was created of which the answer is the presence of categories for each word group in the answers of each responder. Thus, the final result stems from a careful analysis encompassing the different views from 3 investigators and the discussion, reflection and consensus about a set of categories and dictionaries that allowed analyzing the qualitative data of this instrument (Freitas and Janissek, 2000).

The words associated spontaneously to decision-making were analyzed in order to verify if it was possible to identify the occurrence of a model of decision-making process through the words. For comparison, Simon's (1947) basic model was used, which reports the following phases of the decision-making process: a) intelligence or investigation phase, in which occurs the exploration of the setting and the data are processed for clues that may identify problems and opportunities; the variables related to the situation are collected and exposed; b) design or conception phase, in which occurs the creation, development and analysis of potential courses of action; the decision-maker establishes the

problem, develops and analyzes available alternatives; c) choice phase, in which occurs the selection of an alternative or course of action; d) feedback –between the phases that constitute the model, the decision-maker can return to a previous phase, aiming at better elaborating, listing and evaluating alternatives in the pursuit of a solution that better meets their goals and criteria.

Here is a synthesis of the ideas that stem from the most mentioned words in general (without segmentation by nationality), these are (table 2):

Table 2: perceptions on decision-making in the words associated to it

<i>Decision-related actions</i>
<b>Deciding is:</b> 1. to choose (first and foremost); 2. to reflect, think about; 3. to interact, negotiate, communicate, and 4. to take action
<i>Decision qualities</i>
<b>A decision is:</b> 1. <i>thought out, intelligent;</i> 2. <i>important, decisive, irrevocable;</i> 3. <i>good, right;</i> 4. <i>sound, actual, practical and exciting, marvelous, interesting, encouraging...</i> 5. <i>reliable, effective/efficient, and</i> 6. <i>quick.</i>
<i>Decision characteristics</i>
<b>Characteristics and objects related to a decision:</b> 1. firstly, the setting/processes and goals and results; 2. the players involved in the decision-making process and the collective (negotiation, interaction); 3. reflection, intellect; 4. problems, alternatives and the choice per se.

Analyzing the set of replies of the words in relation to the Simon’s model, it can be concluded that the model cannot be observed in its totality, and only some of its phases can be unveiled, these being: the design and the choice phases. However, other elements not indicated by the reference model emerged: the importance given to the collective, to the people, and players involved in the decision-making process; and the importance given to action, indicated by the verbs that refer to do/act, and the adjectives that describe the decision as sound/actual/practical and quick.




These «new» elements are believed to be perhaps related to a stage described by Sprague and Carlson (1982), Mintzberg, Raisinghami and Théorêt (1976), and Silver (1993). This phase would involve «post-decision» activities, also called action/implementation: to communicate and implement a decision, put the decision into effect, explain the decision to people, achieve consensus, achieve commitment from the others to the chosen alternative, at last, collective activities that involve the post-decision period.

Once the words were analyzed according to the Simon’s model, we proceeded on to ascertain how the variable national culture influences the perception on decision-making. Attempting to summarize the results, table 3 shows the categories of words (verbs, adjectives and nouns) most mentioned by each responder group (Brazilians, French and Americans).

Table 3: Conclusions from the analysis of the words related to decision x nationality

Central ideas	DISAGREEING CATEGORIES	BR	FR	USA
Decision is choice, decision per se	decision related to choosing/deciding (VER)	58%	76%	45%
	decision describe as important/decisive(A DJ)	27%	48%	44%
	decision related to choice/decision (NOUN)	16%	39%	16%
Decision is risk/innovation	decision related to risk/innovation (VER)	30%	23%	15%
	decision related to risk/innovation/progress (ADJ)	35%	02%	19%
Decision related to the setting in which the decision-maker is inserted	decision related to research/search (VER)	40%	10%	23%
	decision related to setting/process (NOUN)	44%	26%	45%
	decision related to “economy” (NOUN)	26%	06%	31%
	decision related to information (NOUN)	21%	07%	18%
Decision is power and responsibility	decision related to power/responsibility (VER)	31%	29%	15%
	decision related to power/responsibility/competence (NOUN)	15%	26%	14%
Decision is reflection/intellect	decision related to reflection/intellect (ADJ)	31%	52%	39%
	decision related to reflection/intellect (NOUN)	26%	30%	24%
Decision is feeling	decision related to feelings (VER)	22%	09%	15%
	decision related to feelings (ADJ)	35%	10%	26%
	decision related to feelings (NOUN)	26%	23%	11%
Decision is collectivism/interaction	decision related to collectivism/interaction (ADJ)	17%	26%	06%
	decision described as effective/efficient (ADJ)	32%	17%	19%
Decision is difficult	decision described as difficult (ADJ)	07%	21%	21%
Decision is action and practicality	decision described as sound/actual/practical (ADJ)	39%	19%	15%
	decision described as quick (ADJ)	29%	20%	14%
	decision described as action (NOUN)	27%	21%	05%

LEGEND:

-  Category more mentioned by the responders of this country.
-  The category is neutral for the responders of this country.
-  Category less mentioned by the responders of this country.

The Brazilians are the ones that most define decision as something dynamic, practical, little complex. They're the ones that least relate the idea of reflection to decision, not defining it as something difficult. Literature attributes these characteristics to Brazilians. Hickson and Pugh (1995) define Brazilians as managers that desire rapid and decisive actions in business affairs. Similarly, the Brazilians demonstrate to be the ones that most associate decision to feelings, attributing a more subjective aspect to decision-making.

The French are, among the 3 groups, the ones that most attribute characteristics that we could call "political" to the decision-making process, and demonstrate to be the most reflective amongst the 3 groups. They demonstrate to be concerned with the choice, the decision per se, with reflection/intellect. They're the ones that most speak of power and responsibility and the ones that most qualify the decision as collective, indicating "political" aspects. They're the ones that least associate decision with the setting in which the decision maker is inserted, with processes or aspects related to "economy". They describe (though not so often) the decision as hard, demonstrating, at last, to attribute more complexity to it than the Brazilians. The French attitude finds justifications in literature. Hickson and Pugh (1995, p. 65) say that among the French there's "... suspicion of power, a trend to politicize the organization, for constantly regarding everyone as a manipulative individual seeking a position." Likewise, the French are characterized by appreciating intellectual debate (Hofstede, 1991; Hickson and Pugh, 1995), not by coincidence this group being the one that most related decision-making to reflection/intellect.

The Americans present replies less conclusive than the Brazilians and the French, not revealing any category that they most associate to decision, in comparison with the other groups. However, they demonstrate, just like the Brazilians, to attribute importance to the setting in which the decision-maker is inserted: research, search, information, processes, "economy". Nonetheless, they demonstrate to be the ones that least attribute to a decision a political character (power/responsibility) and indicate not to strongly associate it to the idea of action, as opposed to the Brazilians, and are the ones that least describe it as quick or sound/actual/practical. Therefore, the Americans are shown to be more "neutral" in comparison to the Brazilians and the French.

Seeking the occurrence of other decision-making process models adopted according to nationality, it can be concluded that according to culture, other models are not indicated, except for the fact that the French demonstrate to value the political dimension related to the decision-making process, revealing a trend that points towards the political decision-making process (Anastassopoulos et al., 1991; Einsenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992).

### 3.2 Analyzing the report of a decision made

With instrument 2, the one of composition of sentences, the question in which the responder makes an account of a decision made (both personal and professional) is analyzed. The reports were analyzed under two aspects: in the first one, it was attempted to identify the presence (or not) of the main stages of the decision-making process according to Simon (described in the previous section); the second aspect considered was the types of decisions (personal, career, business, etc.) reported according to nationality. To do so, a

content analysis was performed for the reports of every responder (Bardin, 1977). To identify each one of the phases of the Simon's model, the reports were analyzed as follows: two members of the research staff analyzed each reply (report) separately in a "form" with the phases.

The analysts read each account in question and marked the stages of the decision-making process ascertained in the reply. Once every researcher performed their analysis separately, the analyses were gathered and each reply was checked, looking at disagreements and judging carefully each phase of the process (whether there was occurrence of the phases in the reply or not), and a final result was achieved. It must be stressed that the degree of agreement between the 2 researchers was of 89%.

Here are the results achieved from the analysis of accounts, without considering initially the responders' nationality: Intelligence (116 or 41%); Design (157 or 55%); Choice (238 or 84%); Review (35 or 12%); Feedback (8 or 3%). Thus, the Simons' model was identified in the decisions reported by the responders in its 3 main phases: choice, design and intelligence (albeit with lower incidence). The revision and feedback phases of the process aren't often identified. However, by considering this same variable according to nationality, the phases of the reference model aren't indicated with the same intensity (table 4).

Table 4: Simon's model x nationality

Country Simon's model	Brazil	France	USA	Total
Intelligence	44% (45)	32% (33)	48% (38)	41% (116)
Design	49% (50)	51% (52)	69% (55)	55% (157)
Choice	84% (87)	81% (83)	85% (68)	84% (238)
Review	19% (20)	7% (7)	10% (8)	12% (35)
Feedback	4% (4)	2% (2)	3% (2)	3% (8)
Total	100% (206)	100% (177)	100% (171)	100% (554)

The French are the ones that least indicate the occurrence of the intelligence phase in the process, in comparison with the Brazilians and Americans (with p=8.81%). The Americans are the ones that most indicate the design stage in their accounts (p=1.42%), and regardless of the responders' nationality, the phase the most evident in the accounts is that of choice. The Brazilians, by their turn, are the ones that most indicated the revision phase in their decisions (p=1.8%), even though this phase isn't strongly identified.

### 3.3 Defining decisional profiles for Brazilian, French and American managers

Some characteristics from the evaluations of the 5 dimensions of national culture according to Hofstede (1991) are demonstrated (table 5): aversion to uncertainty, distance from power, individualism x collectivism, masculinity x femininity, and short or long-term orientation. Even though a large part of the stances in the 3 groups show similarities (seek safe alternatives, collectivistic, fear to show their disagreement with superiors), some differences can be observed.

Table 5: Decision-making profiles according to Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of national culture

<p><b>BRAZILIANS</b> - The most collectivistic The values they most admire* are, in the first place, honesty; in second place, work/ambition; in third place, love/feelings, being among the 3 countries the ones that most give importance to intellect/education.</p>
<p><b>FRENCH</b> - Tend to be collectivistic The values they most admire* are love/feelings (first place); work/ambition, and honesty/good character.</p>
<p><b>AMERICANS</b> - The most individualistic The values they most admire* are love/feelings, being the ones that most mention these values. In second place, honestly/good character, and, in third, work/ambition.</p>

(\*) Faced with the specific question: "IF you had children at the age of getting married and could choose your son or daughter-in-law, what personal characteristics would you value the most?"

As for the decision-making style, some common traits were found among the 3 groups, as well as some differences, especially taking into account qualitative data (table 6). All of them often contemplate the alternatives carefully before deciding, and often know beforehand the consequences from the decisions. The French are the ones that least do it so.

Table 6: Decisional styles – qualitative data (words associated to decision-making)

<p><b>BRAZILIANS</b> Decision is related to the idea of action; it's described as quick, sound, actual, practical, indicating a character related to action and a practical sense. It's also described as good/right and effective/efficient. When thinking of a decision, they also associate it with risk, innovation, progress. They relate it to information, research, setting, processes, and aspects linked with economy, as well as factors related to the setting in which the decision-maker is inserted. They present a dynamic style with respect to decision-making.</p>
<p><b>FRENCH</b> Decision is directly related to the idea of choice and decision itself. They're the ones that most associate decision to reflection/intellect. They're also the ones that most mention power and responsibility and describe a decision as collective. They're the ones that least associate decision to the setting in which the decision-maker is inserted, and processes or aspects related to economy. They attribute characteristics that could be labeled as "political" to the decision-making process.</p>
<p><b>AMERICANS</b> Main ideas associated with decision-making: information, research, setting, processes and aspects related to economy, and factors related to the environment in which the decision-maker is inserted. They're the ones that least describe it as quick, sound, actual, practical. They're the ones that least associate decision as collective.</p>

## 4. Conclusions

Different profiles were outlined using both qualitative and quantitative data. Thus, we believe to have provided a reference to researchers and those that may be concerned with knowing a little more about the characteristics of managers in each of the countries in question. Therefore, it is concluded that, when thinking about decision-making, each group thinks of decisions of distinct nature under the influence of cultural factors, unveiling aspects that could hardly surface by using quantitative data only.

As for ascertaining whether the Simon's decision process model occurs or not, the model phases identified are those of choice, design, and, with less intensity, intelligence. The revision and feedback stages often are not identified. Nevertheless, considering the responders' nationality, even though the phases of intelligence, design and choice are present, these aren't indicated with the same intensity: the Americans, for instance, are the group in which the model phases (except for the revision one) are indicated with greater frequency.

It was also found that the responders indicated through the qualitative data (though with different intensities according to their nationality) other elements related to the decisional process that aren't highlighted in the reference model, such as: importance given to the collective ( negotiation, interaction, communication), action (taking action, doing, quick, sound decisions, etc.), and power/responsibility. Decision is also related to the idea of risk/innovation and progress.

Analyzing the results in relation to objectivity/subjectivity of a decision in the quantitative data, for instance, the responders in general (regardless of their nationality) were shown to be rational and objective, often relying on figures in order to make a decision. However, by means of the analysis of the qualitative data the Brazilians were found to be the ones that most relate decision-making to feelings, revealing a greater trend towards subjectivity.

Another opposition between qualitative and quantitative data is revealed in the analysis of how fast decisions are made. In the quantitative data, the responders in general demonstrated to be faster than slow on making a decision, the French appearing as the ones that most tend to make decisions quickly. However, through the qualitative data, the Brazilians were shown to be the ones that most associate decision to the idea of action, innovation, practicality, and rapidity. They reveal, additionally, a more dynamic style in comparison to the French and Americans.

The French, by their turn, reveal in qualitative questions a more political view on the decision-making process and a more reflective style, while the Americans have a more neutral attitude, revealing, however, to attribute importance to the setting, and are the ones that least indicate "political" aspects, unlike the French, or a dynamic view of the process, like the Brazilians do.

These aspects illustrate the complexity of the use of quantitative and qualitative data as well as the possibility of drawing meaningful conclusions by gathering both, enabling us to grasp potential "contradictions" or supplementations in data of distinct nature. For further studies, we must underscore the need of instruments that encompass both modes of data collection and analysis with the purpose of generating knowledge and know-how with surveys of quantitative and qualitative nature.

As main results, in addition to those found by data analysis, we highlight the development of a peculiar methodology for analysis of qualitative data, underpinned on the work by the research staff. From the work methodology also resulted a dictionary of Portuguese, French and English words that the 3 groups associated to decision-making, in addition to a protocol of analysis of our own. The words were organized

and sorted, and may serve other investigators and those concerned with the topic, or even be useful for the analysis of other texts. Finally, we suggested a reduction in the research instruments. The new instruments can be used by all of those interested in studying the decision-making process. Similarly, the research database can be reused for the study of other subject matters. The account of past decisions, for instance, can be considered from different perspectives of investigation, including areas such as Organizational Sociology and Psychology, since it consists of a data source that illustrates the decision-making styles (and, consequently, the thinking style) of executives from 3 different countries.

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