



IMPROVING BOARD DECISION-MAKING: THE ROLE OF DECISION MAPPING

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SUMMARY

In recent years there have been many examples of catastrophic decisions made by Boards of major organisations.¹ These remind us that corporate Boards must constantly strive to ensure their decision making is of the highest standard. This is particularly true in challenging times such as the current Global Financial Crisis.

However it has not been clear what Boards should do in order to improve their decision making. What concrete changes should they make?

We propose the considered adoption of **decision mapping** as a means of improving Board deliberations and hence Board decisions. Decision mapping is making the logic behind Board decisions explicit and transparent in diagrams.

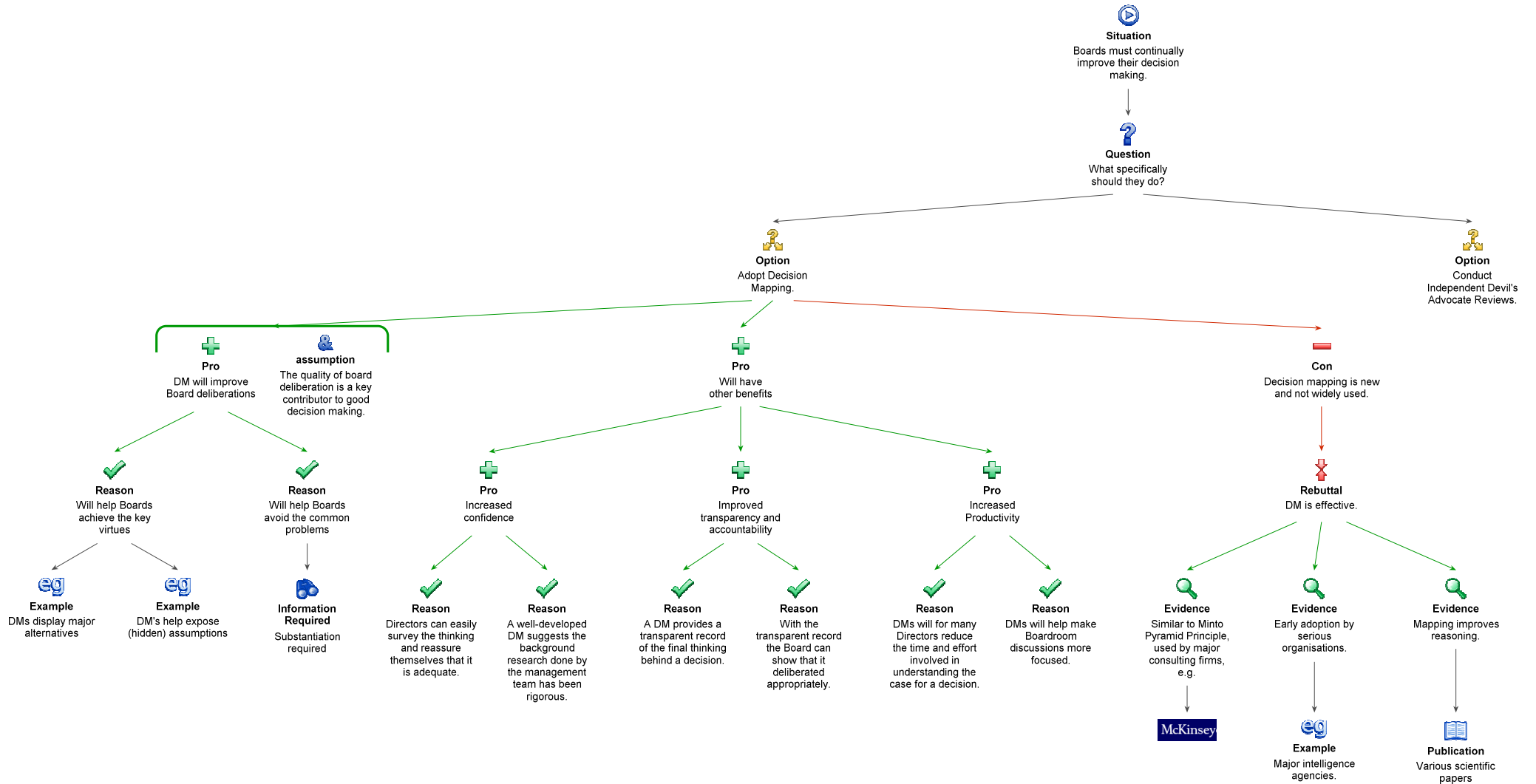
For example, a decision map can be included in the materials presented by Management to the Board in the lead up to a major decision.

Decision mapping is a proven technique which may provide benefits to both Boards and Management.

- **Boards** will find that they can more reliably make the right decisions, because maps will help ensure that their deliberations exhibit key virtues (thoroughness, rigour, etc.) and avoid common problems, such as cognitive biases. Additionally, Boards will have more confidence in the quality of the thinking behind decisions; will be more accountable for their decisions; and may find that Board members are more productive.
- **Management** will benefit by being able to prepare for Board meetings more efficiently and effectively. Decision maps can assist with planning the research around a decision; articulating and “stress testing” the case for a recommendation; and presenting the case to Board in the most compelling manner.
- Decision mapping is novel in a Board context, but it or related techniques have been **proven** elsewhere. The closely related Minto Pyramid Principle is widely used in major management consulting firms; decision mapping is being adopted by many large organisations; and mapping techniques have been shown to improve students’ critical thinking skills.

¹ Consider the approval by the James Hardie Board of a misleading press release, a decision with dire consequences for the Board members themselves, if not the organisation.

AN EXAMPLE OF A DECISION MAP



THE NEED TO IMPROVE BOARD DECISION-MAKING

If Enron's Directors had taken the time to request and evaluate the rationale behind CFO Andrew Fastow's proposal to form off-balance-sheet partnerships, they might have prevented the company's downfall.

- Michael Useem, How Well-Run Boards Make Decisions, *Harvard Business Review*, 2006

I encourage Boards to carefully consider this decision and assess what improvements they can make to their decision making processes.

- ASIC Chairman Tony D'Aloisio, commenting on the NSW Supreme Court decision finding James Hardie Directors in breach of their duties.

The Boards of highly effective organisations constantly strive to improve the quality of their decision-making – particularly in the corporate sector. In recent times, we have seen numerous examples of Boards of major corporations making manifestly flawed decisions with disastrous outcomes. However, even high-performing Boards with strong track records must remain vigilant, because:

- Given the great risks and uncertainties involved in major Board decisions, there is always a chance that the next decision will turn out to be the one that brings down the company. Boards must always be seeking to reduce that chance to an absolute minimum.
- In “interesting” times, such as we are now experiencing with the Global Financial Crisis, it is more important than ever to make the right high-level decisions – and perhaps more difficult to do so. A level of performance that is acceptable in good times may be fatal in tough times.
- With the ever-increasing attention to Board performance, from shareholders, government, and the general public, many if not most Boards are seeking to improve their performance. This means the bar is constantly being raised. Whether by direct comparison (e.g. benchmarked Board Reviews of the type offered by OPPEUS), or indirectly via the overall organisational results achieved, the improvements made by other Boards increase the imperative to do likewise.
- Individual Directors may be held legally liable for bad decisions, and thus have a direct personal incentive to ensure that decisions are made as well as possible.
- In other domains such as sports, music and chess we know that top-level performance results from, and is maintained by, constant monitoring of performance and deliberate attempts to improve. Even greats such as Tiger Woods are constantly working on their skills. Decision-making at top levels is just as demanding, in its own way, as golf and chess, but is far more consequential. It thus deserves the same constant attention.

Few Directors would dispute the value of, and need for, better decision-making processes and outcomes. The real question is how this can be achieved, and whether improving decision-

making performance would require any significant modifications to current practice at Board and senior management levels.

QUALITY BOARD DELIBERATIONS – KEY VIRTUES, COMMON PROBLEMS

From extensive research by Richard Leblanc and James Gillies² and others, we know many of the factors contributing to effective Board performance and governance. These inter-related factors include Board structure and composition, protocols, the leadership role of the Chair, and the behavioural interactions among the Directors.

Here we emphasize another key factor: the quality of Board deliberations. Every Board decision is the direct outcome of a deliberative process, i.e. a process in which arguments and evidence are canvassed and evaluated. The quality of this process is one of the most fundamental contributors to good decision-making around the Boardroom table.

High-quality Board deliberation must exhibit a range of virtues, which include:

1. **Thoroughness.** The grounds for any major decision must be thoroughly investigated and assessed. Directors must have time for reflection and “space” to raise and explore issues. There should not be aspects of the topic that are “off limits” or simply neglected.
2. **Alternatives.** In particular, alternative paths must always be considered. These should be either presented by Management, with explanation of why they are being rejected, or generated and assessed by Directors themselves in the course of their deliberations.
3. **Rigour.** Exploration and assessment needs an appropriate level of intellectual rigour. This includes giving appropriate attention to detail (without becoming lost in the details); and being logically sound, avoiding standard fallacies and cognitive biases. Deliberations should be evidence-based, with positions being adopted and disputes being resolved by canvassing and assessing the relevant data, from whatever sources. Where intuitive judgement – “gut feel” – is playing an important role, there should be at least a concordance of intuition with explicit arguments and evidence.
4. **Assumptions.** In particular, key assumptions should be identified and subjected to rigorous critical scrutiny.
5. **Good information.** Directors must be provided with information that is clear, relevant, concise, timely, accurate, and easy to interpret.
6. **Effective presentations.** Management must present the case for its recommended position in the Business Case submission and in related Boardroom presentation in such a way as to aid Directors’ deliberations, rather than being solely focused on securing their assent. The main outline of Management’s case should not be obscured by a mass of information or by the manner of presentation.

² (Leblanc & Gillies, 2005); see also (Useem, 2006) and (Yates, 2003).

7. **Diversity.** Diverse perspectives must be brought to bear on major decisions. Non-executive Directors must maintain their independence, use their own judgement, be able to seek external expert advice, and feel able to voice contrary opinions.

From the other direction, we know of various problems or “pathologies” commonly afflicting complex deliberations of any kind, including Board deliberations. There are three main kinds:

1. **Cognitive biases.** Deliberative judgement is affected by a range of invisible cognitive biases “hard wired” into our brains. One of the most pervasive and consequential of these is *confirmation bias*, the tendency to seek to confirm rather than refute or challenge our beliefs, and consequently to misinterpret evidence, being over-impressed with supportive evidence and ignoring or dismissing opposing evidence.
2. **Emotions.** Emotions are an unavoidable and often helpful aspect of human decision-making. However, as we all know, they can also be the enemy of wisdom. Human beings in fact have two quite distinct brain systems for decision making. One system is primitive, intuitive, fast, and emotional; the other is relatively recent in evolutionary terms, slow, conscious and deliberate. Complex judgements always involve both brain systems; the problem is when the primitive system exerts too much influence in thinking about issues for which it is ill-suited.
3. **Social dynamics.** When smart individuals gather together in small groups to make decisions, bad things can start happening. Groupthink, in the classic Janis sense³, is one manifestation of this. In a Board context, group culture and politics can drive or distort the decision process, with the result that individual Directors may have their judgement overwhelmed or may find it difficult to influence the outcome.⁴

ACHIEVING QUALITY IN BOARD DELIBERATIONS

In simple terms, good Board deliberations will be those exhibiting the virtues and avoiding the pathologies. However there is often a big difference between knowing what one should do and knowing how to do it.

Everyone would agree on the need for thoroughness, or to avoid groupthink; the difficult part is determining what practical measures might increase thoroughness or foster individual critical judgement, and then implementing those measures. Therefore, to achieve higher standards in the quality of Board decision-making:

- What *specific practices* should Boards retain, adopt or avoid?
- What *concrete changes* should they make to their ways of working?

³ “A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.” (Janis, 1972), page 9.

⁴ “Even Warren Buffett says in Snowball, the recent biography of him, that, while on the Board of Coca-Cola, he failed to challenge the CEO about an issue even though he was quite sure the CEO was making a serious mistake and was right.” Carroll & Mui, Perfecting the Art of the Deal, p.2

In their recent, award-winning bestseller *Billion Dollar Lessons*⁵, consultants Paul Carroll and Chunka Mui review hundreds of major corporate failures and the strategic thinking behind them. Every one of these failures was preceded by Board decisions which turned out to have disastrous consequences. Carroll and Mui's goal was to discern the common themes in these decision-making failures, so that others could learn the lessons more cheaply.

They claim that failures tended to be associated with one of seven types of strategy, such as pursuing a merger or acquisition in order to achieve synergies. The problem is that decision makers tend to overestimate the benefit of these synergies and underestimate the difficulty of achieving them.

In one sense, the lesson to be learned from this is just: "be very careful when pursuing synergies, and don't be overly optimistic when you do." But Carroll and Mui recognise that such broad admonishments, while embodying costly wisdom, are unlikely to make much practical difference on their own. Instead, they put forward a particular practice Boards can adopt which, if properly implemented, can have the effect that Boards are more likely to avoid the pitfalls associated with the seven risky strategies.

That practice is the **Independent Devil's Advocate Review**. They advise appointing a credible, neutral "outsider" to conduct a systematic review aimed at (constructively) challenging a proposed decision or strategy. They provide five guidelines for the operation of such reviews.

According to Carroll and Mui, these Devil's Advocate Reviews will help organisations avoid the seven types of strategic mistakes and, in general, improve top-level decision-making. But of course these types of Reviews will only have this effect *if they are carried out well*; and a well-conducted Review would, of course, have many of the qualities already identified as present in good Board deliberative processes – thoroughness, rigour, and so forth.

The question of how these necessary qualities can be achieved has been sidestepped, but cannot be put off forever.

PROPOSAL: USE DECISION MAPPING

We propose a practice that can help Boards improve their deliberations and the consequent quality of their decision-making. The proposal is to incorporate decision mapping into the overall Board decision process, particularly in the preparation and presentation, by Management, of the cases for particular decisions.

WHAT IS IT?

Decision mapping is displaying the reasoning behind a decision in a diagram. Decision maps make use of colours, lines, shapes and icons to help communicate complex argument structures. At Board level, a decision map concisely summarises and communicates the explicit and implicit logic in a submission being put to the Board for decision.

⁵ (Carroll & Mui, 2008)

Figure 1 is an extract of a partial decision map.

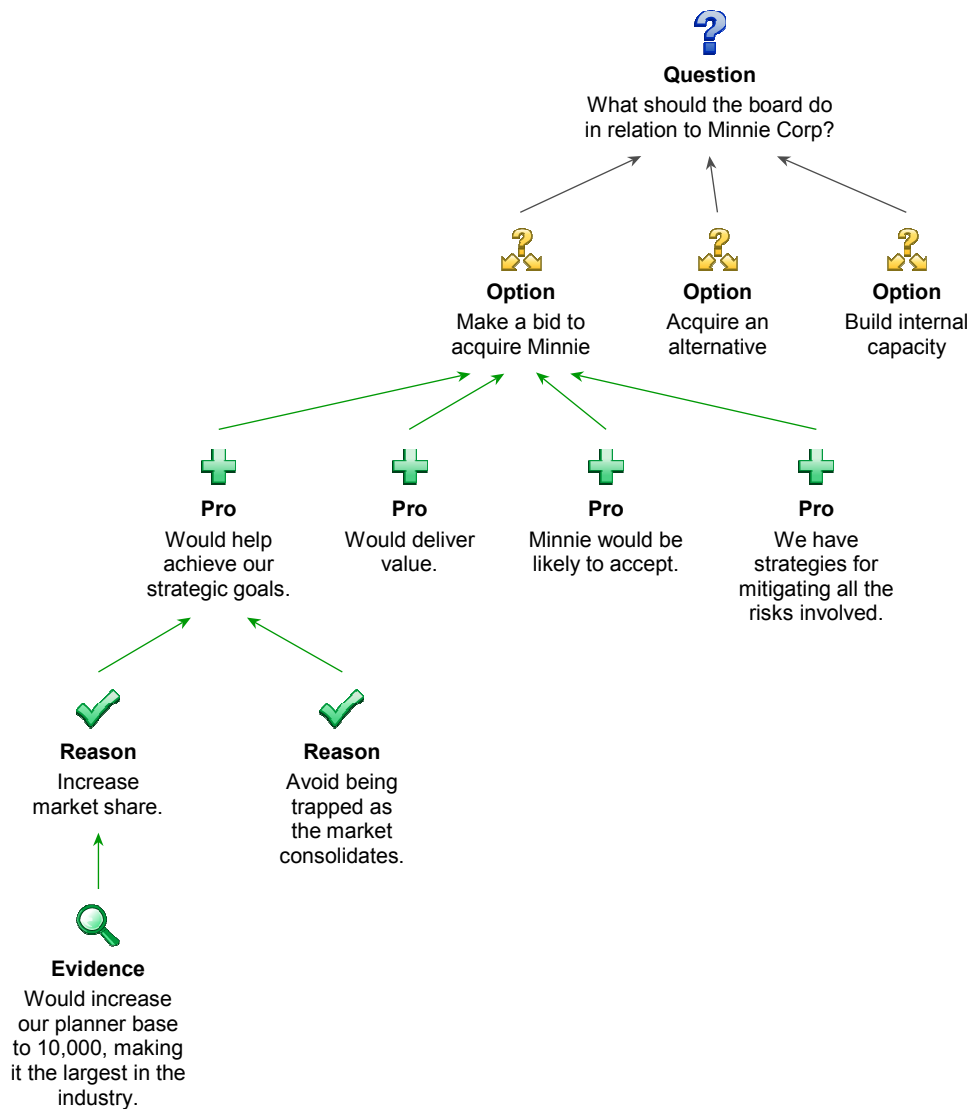


Figure 1. A schematic decision map. It concerns a hypothetical decision to acquire another company. Only a small portion of the map is displayed here, but it illustrates some key features of decision maps: showing the alternatives considered, the claimed advantages of the preferred option, arguments supporting a claimed option, and detailed evidence.

Construction of decision maps is governed by rules and conventions. These help determine when a map is done “properly,” and so can help introduce structure and rigour into the thinking.

The rules and conventions also underpin one of the great benefits of a decision map, which is that another person can quickly and easily see what is going on.

Decision maps, by design, present the case in a clear and simple manner. However, decision maps are not for this reason simplistic. The clarity and easy readability of a good decision map is generally only the result of strenuous efforts to “boil down” and sharpen the thinking involved.

HOW CAN IT BE USED?

Decision mapping can be used in a variety of ways throughout the Board decision-making process. For example:

1. **Preparation:** Decision mapping can help the management team in researching the issues, formulating their recommendations, and preparing their case for Board consideration.
2. **Presentation:** A decision map can be part of the presentation to the Board. For example, a decision map printed in colour on A3 sized paper can be appended to a Board paper, as a summary of the case being put forward. Additionally, it could be used as the “roadmap” for the actual presentation to the Board.
3. **Facilitation:** Decision mapping can be used to facilitate discussions. Typically the map would be projected into the Boardroom and a skilled facilitator would modify the map in real time to reflect the group’s developing understanding of the arguments and their quality.
4. **Documentation/Archiving:** Decision maps can be used as a compact way to document the thinking behind the final decision, and to archive that thinking for future reference. This can be a very useful way of capturing a snapshot of institutional thinking at a point in time.
5. **Review:** If a decision needs to be reviewed or “re-made” a number of years down the road, it will help greatly to have a compact, easily-scanned digest of the core thinking at the time of the first decision. Subsequent access to this form of knowledgebase can reduce the need to “re-invent the wheel”.

BENEFITS FOR BOARDS

BETTER DECISION-MAKING

First and foremost, decision mapping will help Boards make better decisions by enabling Board deliberations to more consistently exhibit the key virtues, and avoid the pathologies, described earlier.

Consider, for example, the idea that Boards should always be presented with the major **alternatives** to the action recommended by Management, together with the grounds for their rejection. This will happen automatically if decision maps are included in the materials provided to Boards. The rules of decision mapping specify that, at the top levels, a map is constituted by an open question (“What should we do about...”) and a range of options; see *Figure 1* for an illustration. Consequently, if decision mapping is adopted, the case put to the Board for decision will have this virtue “for free.”

Another example is the way in which decision mapping can help expose **assumptions**. An assumption is any significant aspect of the case which has been taken to be true without further substantiation – and which may therefore be unwarranted. When viewing a decision map, it is quite simple to see at a glance which aspects of the case as stated are assumptions in this sense; they are, crudely put, the boxes which have nothing under them. Further, a sophisticated form of decision mapping can be very useful in exposing **hidden assumptions** – those ideas which

are critical to the success of the case, but which haven't even been articulated yet. All too often, conventional approaches to decision-making trips up due to overlooking these hidden assumptions.

Table: How decision maps can help improve decision making by reinforcing key virtues and alleviating common pathologies.

Virtues	
1. Thoroughness	A properly developed decision map (or series of maps) will comprehensively cover the relevant alternatives, arguments and evidence.
2. Alternatives	By design, a decision map displays all major alternatives, not just the recommended alternative.
3. Rigour	By providing a structured framework, decision maps help impose discipline on thinking; and by making the thinking fully explicit, they invite a higher degree of critical reflection.
4. Assumptions	Decision maps make visually transparent where assumptions lie, thus helping expose them to scrutiny.
5. Good Information	In a decision map, every idea or piece of information must have a well-defined position in the overall logic. This helps ensure that all and only the relevant information is provided.
6. Effective Presentations	Decision maps are an alternative, visual form of presentation which many Directors may find more useful than traditional formats.
7. Diversity	Decision maps make it easier for Directors who may not be specialists in a particular area to comprehend and perhaps challenge the basis of a decision in that area.
Pathologies	
1. Cognitive Biases	Decision maps help counteract confirmation bias by making contrary information visually prominent and hence harder to neglect.
2. Emotions	Decision maps directly support our brains' conscious, deliberative decision systems, giving those systems a stronger role in decision making.
3. Social Dynamics	Decision maps help "de-personalize" issues, i.e. break down the identification of positions and arguments with individuals, thereby reducing some harmful social dynamics.

Beyond the primary benefit of enabling Boards to make better quality decisions, there are a number of secondary benefits of decision mapping.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE

Decision maps can help increase confidence in a decision and the quality of the thinking behind it. It is one thing to make the right call; it is quite another to be justifiably confident that one has done so. Decision mapping helps with the latter because, with map in hand, Directors can more easily reassure themselves that there is a well-developed case for the decision: that relevant

alternatives have been considered, that detailed substantiation has been provided, objections and risks properly countered, and so forth.

Further, Directors can more easily reassure themselves that Management has taken an appropriately thorough and rigorous approach to researching the issues and preparing the recommendation for Board consideration. It is generally impossible for Non-Executive Directors to review every aspect of the research and logic behind an important decision. The quality of the background work must be manifest within the limited window through which the Directors are looking. When the final recommendation obviously displays rigorous structure, Directors can be more confident that acceptable levels of analytical rigour were present throughout the development of the recommendation.

GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Even the best decision process cannot guarantee good outcomes, since outcomes always turn to some extent on the course of subsequent events, many of which cannot be controlled, influenced or even foreseen. However a Board should be able to demonstrate that its thinking was good at the time, even if the results were ultimately disappointing. This is being *accountable*, in at least one sense of the term.

Accountability in turn requires *transparency*. Others must be able to see not only what the thinking was, but also that it was in fact solid. If the core reasoning is scattered in masses of documentation (Board papers, email threads), lost in the ether of Boardroom discussions, or warped by self-serving distortions of individual memories, then it will be difficult if not impossible for outsiders to ascertain whether the Board had in fact made a well-considered decision at the time.

Decision mapping, by its nature, makes the thinking behind decisions more transparent. It brings the key lines of argument together in one place, organises them using standard rules and conventions, and displays them for easy review. A Board wishing to demonstrate accountability – wishing, in other words, to always be able to show that it made wise decisions on solid grounds – can do so much more easily if its standard processes for making important decisions include the use of such Decision Maps.

REDUCED WORKLOADS, GREATER PRODUCTIVITY

An obvious question to ask is whether the benefits of decision mapping outweigh the various costs involved in taking it on. With this in mind it is worth mentioning that decision mapping promises, in certain respects, to improve the efficiency of Board processes and the productivity of Directors.

First, having a decision map will, for many individual Directors, **reduce the time and mental effort involved** in coming to understand the case for a particular proposal. Instead of having to laboriously piece together the various bits (some unstated) into a coherent overall “take” on the argument, a Director can scan the transparent, structured presentation. (For an analogy, consider a jigsaw puzzle. It is easy enough to review an assembled puzzle to see that it has been put together properly. It takes far more time and effort to assemble the puzzle from scratch – especially if the pieces have been scattered inside

A decision map constitutes a concise summary of the logic behind the decision.

Whatever the process by which the decision was arrived at, a decision map can archive a clear record of the grounds on which it was made, at that time.

the toy chest, which is often a problem with poorly structured Board submissions.) A Director will then be able to devote proportionately more time and effort to more useful activities such as making a preliminary assessment of the quality of the case and identifying key issues to be pursued further.

Second, decision maps will help **make Boardroom discussions more relevant and useful**. Directors and Management will start out “on the same page,” and discussion can then revolve less around presenting, clarifying and comprehending the case and more around what are its strengths and weaknesses, what other alternatives there might be, where more work might need to be done, etc.

BENEFITS FOR MANAGEMENT

Although we have been primarily concerned with Board decision-making and have discussed the issues from the Board perspective, Management should also be vitally interested in the potential of decision mapping to enhance their dealings with the Board.

Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) can have much at stake – in terms of their credibility and standing in the eyes of the Board – when they present a submission to the Board for decision. They want to be as sure as possible that they are backing the right recommendation, that they have assembled a compelling case for the recommendation, that the Directors will understand the case and recognise its strengths, and that they will consequently endorse Management’s considered position. Conversely, CEOs will want to avoid the wasted resources and delays involved when a recommendation fails to “get up”; being embarrassed when Directors identify weaknesses in the research or logical flaws; or, in the worst case, have the Board acquiesce in a decision which turns out disastrously for the organisation and perhaps the CEO’s career.

Decision mapping can help address these concerns by providing a locus of critical scrutiny, an arena in which the CEO and his team can articulate, review and “stress test” the reasoning before taking it to Board.

BETTER RESEARCH PLANNING

In the early stages, a decision map can be used to lay out the basic issues, including the basic options and the main lines of argument. This enables the team to see clearly where there are gaps and potential problems or weaknesses. The team is then in a position to proceed efficiently in its research activities, seeking first the most critical information, then fleshing out other aspects as appropriate.

UNCOVERING PROBLEMS IN ADVANCE

As the time of decision draws closer, one of the options will usually be standing out as the most attractive. This is the time to subject the case for that option (and against the others) to hard-headed critique, attempting to identify oversights, biases or logical flaws⁶ which might lead to

⁶ The Australian Army’s case for purchasing the Abrams battle tank turned out, on close examination, to involve a serious logical blunder in the interpretation of key data from the Vietnam war – though their main conclusions turned out to still be defensible. It was only through careful mapping of the arguments that the logical flaw was revealed. But far more than this was revealed. The mapping showed that the many objections to the decision by its critics had

the wrong decision being made or a poor case being presented. A decision map displays the case in the most transparent and rigorous form possible, thereby helping maximise the chance that problems will be identified and corrected.

MORE EFFECTIVE PRESENTATIONS

Leading-up to the Board meeting, an important challenge for the Management team is deciding how to present the recommendation and the case for it. Having a well-developed decision map in hand can greatly expedite this process:

- *Selection.* It can help the team determine, from the great mass of data and the complex tangle of considerations, what information and arguments to present to the Board. The golden thread here is *the logic of the case*. Fundamentally the Board needs to know the key lines of argument and the evidence directly bearing upon them. This is the filter or sieve through which the great mass of background information should be passed so that only the most relevant “makes the cut”.
- *Delivery.* The decision map can help the team deliver the case to the Board, either by governing the structure of the Board submission (in whatever form) or, more directly, by being provided, in part or whole, to the Board for its review.
- *Persuasion.* A decision map can help the team communicate not just *what* the case is but how *logically compelling* it is. It can, in other words, help the team rationally persuade Directors.

VISUAL VERSUS VERBAL THINKERS

It is well established, in cognitive science, that there are differences in peoples’ natural modes of thinking. In particular, some are more comfortable and skilled at handling information in purely verbal form, others favour columns of figures, yet others take more easily to pictures, charts or diagrams.

Consequently, people will differ in the degree to which they find a decision map helpful. A lawyer with many decades of training and experience in handling arguments is likely to prefer arguments to be presented in traditional form. But an engineer or architect accustomed to seeing complex situations laid out diagrammatically may well find an argument diagram very intuitive and convenient. There also appear to be generational differences; younger people have grown up in a more image-oriented, less “discursive” information environment and tend to have trouble following complex arguments in standard prose formats.

Therefore we do not propose that decision maps be the only form in which complex cases are presented. Rather we **recommend that maps be provided alongside more familiar display formats**, so that the audience can follow the arguments in whatever form works best for them. The goal is to improve efficiency of communication and quality of thinking; this is achieved by providing information in a range of formats, catering for individuals’ differing information assimilation preferences. There is little point in being dogmatic about which format is “best.”

similar logical flaws and, also, that the greatest sensitivity in the case had not been coherently addressed by either side to the debate. See (Monk, 2007).

DOES IT WORK?

Decision mapping is a recent innovation, and is yet to be widely used at Board level. Nevertheless a range of considerations support the utility of the approach:

1. Decision mapping is closely related to the well-known **Minto Pyramid Principle** (MPP) methodology (Minto, 2007). MPP originated in management consultants McKinsey & Co. and it, or some close variant, is used as the underpinning of their reporting and communications by most of the major management consulting firms worldwide. The close relationship is unsurprising, since Decision Mapping and MPP really just reflect fundamental principles of good thinking in a simple visual format.
2. US **intelligence agencies** have incorporated a closely-related, Austhink-developed methodology, argument mapping, into their analysts' toolkits and have included it in analytical training for some years now.
3. **Major Australian organisations** are taking increasing interest in visual mapping techniques for clarifying complex argumentation. For example, the Australian Army recently engaged Austhink to conduct an extensive mapping-based review of the arguments surrounding the purchase of the Abrams tank (Monk, 2007). A wide range of other organisations are now starting to use mapping in their activities or training, including DLA Phillips Fox, Origin Energy, Committee for Melbourne, and ANU.
4. Extensive **scientific research** has found that these mapping techniques can result in substantial gains in general critical thinking skills in university students (van Gelder, Bissett, & Cumming, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Fundamentally, decision mapping is just a way to help increase the clarity and rigour of thinking. Just as well-designed graphs and charts can help us understand and draw insights from complex data, so decision maps can help us comprehend and evaluate complex arguments. Since Board decisions invariably turn on the overall balance of the arguments, anything that helps us cope with those arguments can help improve our chances of making the right decision.

Decision mapping is not some radically new way of making decisions. Boards already canvass options and choose between options based on the strength of the arguments; they already identify detailed evidence, subject assumptions to critical scrutiny, raise challenges, etc. And Boards already make good use of diagrams of various kinds, as can be readily seen by perusing the Board Papers of any listed company. Decision mapping simply brings these two aspects of Board practice together.

We don't believe that decision mapping is an instant solution to the challenges of Board decision-making. Alexander the Great was advised by his tutor, Menaechmus, that there is no royal road to mastery of geometry.⁷ In more modern terms, there is no corporate jet that can

⁷ "O King, for travelling over the country, there are royal roads and roads for common citizens, but in geometry there is one road for all"

whisk us to the land of infallible decisions. The best we can hope for is practical measures that will reliably increase the chance of making the right call.

Nor do we believe that decision mapping is the only new practice that Boards should consider. The Independent Devil's Advocate Review, for example, is plausible as an approach for avoiding major strategic mistakes. Boards should, in general, engage in whatever practices are shown by sound evidence to be likely to enhance the quality of its decisions. Decision mapping complements, rather than displaces, such practices.

Decision mapping is a recent innovation. Though it and related techniques are widely used elsewhere, it is only now coming to the attention of Boards of Directors. It does not yet have the kind of longevity and pedigree that some Boards or Chairs may require before taking it on. But every innovation was at some point a strange new idea. What matters is not how long it has been used and by whom, but rather whether it is effective and provides tangible advantages.

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Austhink Consulting

Austhink Consulting is small Melbourne consulting firm providing facilitation, consulting and training services in critical thinking for organisations. Austhink have been pioneers in the development of decision mapping and related mapping techniques. Austhink clients tend to be large organisations in the corporate, government and professional worlds, including major intelligence agencies, law firms, banks and government departments.

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Geoff Williams is Principal Consultant, OPPEUS International. Since 2006, he has played a pivotal role in the development of the OPPEUS Governance practice. Additionally, he heads-up an independent network of consultants and associates, which is using world-class diagnostic tools to help the Boards and Executive teams of organisations achieve breakthroughs in organisational performance and sustainability. Prior to joining OPPEUS, he was instrumental (as the company's CEO) in establishing a successful Australian survey and research company. Additionally, he successfully established the Board Reporting and Enterprise Performance Management practices for two of Australia's leading consulting firms. Since the early 1990s, he has personally advised over 50 organisations in Australasia on best practice approaches to Board and Executive reporting.

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OPPEUS International is a firm of *Strategic Leadership Advisors* with expertise in four practice domains of Governance, Talent, Organisation and Remuneration. While we are specialists in each area, we understand the need of our clients to manage the intersecting linkages across the individuals, the teams, the organisation and the governing structure within their concern. We can leverage our breadth of expertise and cross functional teams, to deliver a cross-domain solution for our clients.

Our services extend from searching for top talent to fill CEO, executive, and Non-Executive Director roles to providing remuneration advice on these roles, to reviewing the Boards of private and not-for-profit companies, and facilitating top team performance programs to improve executive and Board team functioning and performance.

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