Decision making environments in the meeting planning industry

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DECISION MAKING ENVIRONMENTS
IN
THE MEETING PLANNING INDUSTRY

by
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DECISION MAKING ENVIRONMENTS
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Chia-Mei Johanna Liu

ABSTRACT

This was a pilot study on the decision making environments in the meeting planning industry. A critical incident questionnaire which was developed by Boone & Kilmann (1988) and later used by Janet Barnard (1992) in her research “Decision Environments of Small Firms” was adapted.

The questionnaires were mailed to 210 samples which were randomly chosen from members of Meeting Planners International in four states, and there were 30 valid responses received. Among those 30 respondents, the majority (70%) are female meeting planners. Most of the participants are over 30 years old, and their years of experience in the meeting planning area mostly spread in 4-15 years, while 50% of the participants have been working for 4-8 years in current organizations.

In the first part of the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to consider and briefly describe a work related decision in which he/she was recently involved. There were 15 participants (50%) answered this question and site selection was the most common answer.

Part II of the questionnaire was a set of 32 items randomly arranged and could be divided into 6 factors. As the result of the general responses, the ranking of the six factors was: 1. factor 1-Inputs, 2. factor 2-Problems, 3. factor 4-Teamwork, 4. factor 6-Resources, 5. factor 3-Rewards, and 6. factor 5-Politics. The answers of the 32 items were also grouped according to respondents’ positions, geographic locations, and organization styles. Two-sample t-tests of a
0.95 confidence interval were used to identify if there was any significance. In the t-tests, four significant differences were found. The first one was between the respondents who work for corporations and the respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies regarding factor 5-Bureaucratic Block & Politics. The second significance was also concerning factor 5 and was found between respondents who work as CEOs and respondents who work as meeting planners. The third one was concerning factor 6-Resource Adequacy and was found between respondents who work as meeting planners and respondents who work as administrators. The last one was about factor 5 and was found between respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies and the 30 general respondents.

Part III of the questionnaire was concerning the top five probable problem areas, and ‘finance’ was the most concerned problem area. However, respondents from different organizations show differences, for example, respondents from independent meeting planning companies showed special concern on liability while others did not.

A comparison about the ranking of the six factors between this study and Barnard’s study on small firms showed that the meeting industry regards “Inputs” as the most important factor and “Politics” as the least important one, while in Barnard’s study “Politics” is the most important one and “Inputs” is the least important one.

This study proves that the meeting planning industry has its own concern about decision environments. Even within the industry, the organization styles and the positions would affect the perspectives. It is recommended to adapt the instrument and conduct further researches for a better understanding and also to help to improve the industry’s decision environment.
Sincerely I dedicate this project and myself to God for his mercy and grace helping me to complete my work. I have found the past year to be very challenging, but with God’s promises and the help from all the nice people surrounding me, I have overcome.

Dr. Edward Stockham, the Chairperson of my committee, was always available whenever I was in trouble. Since English is not my native language, I especially appreciate his patience in correcting my paper. Prof. Edward Steffens, my advisor, gave me the best inspiration in the meeting planning profession. His vigorous and practical teaching made his class an enlightenment to me.

Before starting this project, the only two things I knew about statistics were mean and percentage. Fortunately, Ben Jang, one of my friends, was nice and taught me about basic statistics while Asst. Prof. Thomas K. Witt in the applied statistics department assisted me in computing. Leonard Ko, a significant friend of mine, gave me continuous encouragement and helped me with all the graphics in this project.

I thank God for giving me my wonderful family. Ever since I have come to the U.S., talking to my parents on the phone weekly has become
the best cure for my homesickness. However, my Lord is nice to me. In addition to my family, I am surround by my dear Christian brothers and sisters who are my family in God. It was their support and prayer that carried me through all the tests.

It is so nice to know that I am not alone. May God remember all the days in my life and bless the people love and help me.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

If our lives can be divided into numerous parts, then each decision we make must be the jointers.

Decision making has been an important and yet critical key to human civilization. Try to image if Adam did not take the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and eat it for the sake of Eve, human beings might have still lived in the paradise-the Garden of Eden.

To a business organization in the modern society, decision making is no less decisive than in any other situation. Why do different people make different decisions while under a similar circumstance? Why do some organization survive successfully in a competition while others fail? Is there any formula or common criteria for those successful decisions or even failed ones?

In the past five decades, researchers have tried to uncover the problem solving and decision making black box in either the human behavior or business arena to help to make better decisions, and yet no one simple theory has been found to perfectly fit all categories. For example, researchers who work on the cognitive approach have been dedicated to decision making processes and behavioral researches, while the other group of researchers are studying on computer information system. Each of these arenas seems to have their own characteristics and criteria when concerning making decisions.
Among those studies on decision making and problem solving in all kinds of arena, no relative research has been done in the meeting planning industry. To open the decision making black box and build up a certain level of understanding of the decision making environment in the meeting planning industry can be a contribution to the whole body of decision making science and, therefore, motivated this study.

Problem Statement

After the industry economy, many major and popular criteria concerning business decision making are mostly influenced by manufacturing industries. For example, “cost control” is still one of the “golden rules” in many business organizations. But as one of the service industries, the meeting planning industry has its own special focus on organizing and coordinating; therefore, does it have the same concern as other industries do when making business decision? What factors are more influential in its decision making environment? What is the most concerned problem in the industry? This study intends to identify the decision making environments in the meeting planning industry so that the improvements can be made for future good.

Hypothesis

In this study, six factors concerning decision making environment which were developed by Larry W. Boone and Ralph H. Kilmann (1988) were examined. They are:
1. Inputs. Multiple inputs and alternatives.

2. Problem. Problem identification and organization.


4. Team work. Use of group efforts.

5. Resources. Resource adequacy.


The hypothesis of this study is that the importance of each factor viewed by the respondents differs according to their positions, organization styles, and geographic locations.

Assumptions

It is assumed that people who registered and were accepted to be the members in Meeting Planning International Association (MPI) have sufficient experiences in planning or organizing meetings or exhibitions. Therefore, they were qualified as meeting planners and potential respondents in this study. Ideally, their responses can be representative of the meeting planning industry’s perspective.

Methodology

This study is expected to be a pilot study on decision making environment in the meeting planning or even other service industries. The methodology section is divided into several subsections: sample & population, instrumentation, period of data collection, and method of data analysis.
Sample & Population

The Meeting Planners International Association, one of the representative associations in the industry, was chosen to be the source of the population and samples. According to its 1992-1993 directory, the membership spreads out all over the world. However, concerning the research budget and other limited resources, the United States is chosen to be the target country.

The number of U.S. members is roughly 5220, and four of the states-California (CA), Illinois (IL), New York (NY), and Texas (TX)-were picked for possessing most members among the states. Consequently, the population in this study was set to be the four states’ 2086 members (CA 822, IL 460, NY 416, TX 388).

The sample size was decided to be 10% out of the population including 82 from California, 46 from Illinois, 42 from New York, and 39 from Texas as showed in Figure 1. A random number table listed in Earl Babbie’s “Survey Research Methods” was used to identify each sample from the directory.

Instrumentation

A critical incident questionnaire developed by Boone and Kilmann (1988) was used to measure the kinds of decisions made and the structures and processes supporting them. This incident questionnaire was adapted by Janet Barnard (1992) in her research on “Decision Environments of Small Firms.” The questionnaire contained 32 items clustered into 6 factors that were shown to impact the effectiveness of decision making in the workplace.
Figure 1. Geographic position of samples
Table 1 summarizes the six factors, and includes the Cronbach's alpha value which measured the internal consistency of the items in each factor.

The two mailed cover letters and the questionnaire are attached in Appendix 1, 2, and 3. In the first part of the questionnaire, each sampled meeting planner is asked to consider a work related decision in which he or she was recently involved, and to provide a brief written description of the situation. In the second part the subjects then respond to 32 statements, using a 5 point Likert scale to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement with the item as it pertained to the decision situation, or indicate that the item was not applicable to the situation.

To identify the most probable problem area, a set of operating areas were provided in the following section and the subjects were asked to choose top 5 likely problem areas by indicating 1, the most probable problem area, to 5, the fifth probable problem area. The subjects were also asked to provide personal information concerning years of work, position, gender, and age. Organizational information about the nature and the age of the company, the business style, and number of employees was asked as well.

**Period of Data Collection**

The first round of 210 questionnaires with cover letters and stamped return envelopes were mailed to the samples on June 5th, 1993 at the addresses documented on the Meeting Planner International’s 1992-1993 directory.
Table 1. Factors in the decision environment with Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient

Inputs - Multiple Inputs and Alternatives (.68)
This cluster measured the establishment of clear objectives of the decision, whether alternatives were identified and considered, the availability of information, freedom of communication, support for the implementation of the decision, and the willingness of the decision makers to take some risks.

Problem - Problem Identification and Organization (.69)
The items in this group explored the accuracy of problem identification, the clarity of relationships, the appropriate use of skills, and the reliability of information used in coping with the decision.

Rewards - Rewards for Good Decisions (.63)
This group of items measured the effectiveness of performance measures, the relationship between rewards and ideas, and motivational outcomes of the reward system.

Teamwork - Use of Group Efforts (.62)
These items examined the hierarchical source of the decision, the opportunity for input from others, and use of groups in decision making.

Politics - Bureaucratic Blocks and Politics (.72)
Beliefs about the existence of structural and political aspects of the environment as they affected the decision were measured by items relating to red tape, resistance to change, and political activity.

Resources - Resource Adequacy (.67)
This dimension measured the adequacy of physical resources in the decision making process; the access to and reliability of equipment used by the decision makers.

By June 24th, 1993, twenty-two responses were received and follow-up telephone calls were made to those who had not yet responded. As the result of the follow-up calls, 35 copies of the original questionnaires each with an identical cover letter were sent to those who showed willingness to participate. In these questionnaires 32 of them were sent by fax and 3 were mailed. After sending out these second round questionnaires, ten more questionnaires were received either by mail or fax. By July 15th, 1993 the total responses were 32 while two of them were indicated by the individual respondents to be inapplicable and, therefore, were blank responses.

Method of Data Analysis

After receiving the 32 responses, each of the answers were coded for statistical purposes, the data was keyed into a file which was set for a statistic computer program-Minitab. The raw data was properly edited and calculated to generate the histograms, means and standard deviations of each question and factor. Percentages are calculated to report demographic information.

Two-tailed two-sample t-tests were used to show the significance between the results of the respondents within different charactergory. For example, the respondents were divided into categories according to their positions, geographic locations, and organization styles. The answers of people who were in New York state are compared to the answers of people who were in Taxes, and the like. The confidence interval of the two-sample t-tests was at 0.95 and the significance with a p value higher than 0.10 was rejected.
Definitions of Terms

1. Decision making. According to John S. Carroll & Eric J. Johnson (1990), decision making is a process by which a person, group, or organization identifies a choice or judgment to be made, gathers and evaluates information about alternatives, and selects from among the alternatives.

2. Meeting. The broad meaning of a “meeting” is an encounter between at least two entities, not necessarily between people. But in this study, the definition is more specific as Hildreth (1990) stated: the communication of intellectual and emotional stimuli to two or more people in a manner designed to secure the accomplishment of the peoples' common purpose.

3. Meeting professional. The meeting professional, according to Hildreth (1990), is a communication expert who analyzes a communication situation and then selects, plans, and uses, in a cost-conscious manner, those communication techniques needed to influence attendants in order to accomplish a purpose.

4. Minitab. Minitab is a general purpose data analysis system for organizing, analyzing and reporting statistical data. The software provides the user with a wide range of basic and advanced functionality while maintaining a high level of ease of use.

5. Meeting Planners International. The organization was founded in Chicago in 1972 by Buzz Bartow, Marion Kershner, and Jay Lurrye to provide a concept of an umbrella organization for the meeting profession and later has been known as Meeting Planners International (MPI).
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

There are two main approaches in the literature research: one is on the decision making science and the other is on the meeting planning industry, especially on meeting planners' roles and duties.

The earliest literature on decision making founded in this research process is the book named "Problem Solving-Research, Method, and Theory" edited by Benjamin Kleinmuntz in 1966. The book is the first of an annual series of symposia in the area of cognition under the sponsorship of Carnegie Institute of Technology and composes twelve papers prepared by twelve professor. As one of the professors, Bert F. Green, stated in the introduction: problem solving has always been easier to talk about than to investigate. Until about 1945, psychological research on problem solving could best be described as Sporadic. A few lonely scientists worked consistently in the area but there was no major point of view or technique to bring this work into focus, as Hull’s stimulus-response (S-R) theories and Skinner’s operant techniques had done for learning. Then, Newell, Simon, and Shaw (1958) introduced a new theory of problem solving, based on concepts of information processing and computer programming. They were primarily interested in the process of solving problems and argued that computer programs could serve as exact, unambiguous theories about the way humans process information to arrive at solutions.
Their approach has spawned a number of experimental and theoretical studies, but its main importance is in providing a theoretical position for students to acclaim or assail. The resulting arguments have been lively and fruitful; controversy often begets progress in science.

At about the time that information processing theories were being introduced, some (S-R) theorist and operant-behavior analysts were turning their attention to the complex behavior exhibited in problem-solving situations. Arguing that complex behavior is not different in kind from simple discrimination learning, they proceeded to analyze problem solving in the language of operants, habit family hierarchies, and chains of association. Generally, these researchers have disavowed any interest in process, preferring either “mediating responses” or nothing at all intervening between stimulus and response in the problem-solving situation.

Green thought that the trouble with problem solving and other behavior people called thinking was that a simple S-R contingency or a chain of such contingencies did not provide an adequate account of the behavior. He indicated that hierarchies of S-R contingencies are needed. Studies of grammar by Miller, Chomsky (1962), and others, strongly indicate that some kind of hierarchical organization is crucial in any adequate theory of verbal behavior. Organizational hierarchies of activity are the substance of computer programs so the language of programming (flow diagrams, subroutines, list structures, and the like) provides a convenient way of talking about complex behavior. In fact, Millenson (1964) has pointed out that a hierarchy of S-R contingencies can
readily be translated into a hierarchy of TOTE (Test-Operate-Test-Exit) units (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960), or into other programming representations. Nevertheless, the behaviorists focus their interest on the S-R units, whereas the information processors attend mainly to the organization of units into hierarchies.

The emphasis on organization was not new at that time. Gestalt psychologists such as Koehler (1925), and Wertheimer (1945) had seen problem solving as a matter of integrating previously learned responses. For them, true problem solving was insightful, meaning that the organization occurred relatively suddenly (the “aha” experience) and that the organization of responses was both enduring and readily generalizable. But Gestalt psychology had little to say about the structure of insightful organization, and the research springing from this tradition was concerned mainly with establishing insight as a phenomenon.

The research strategies of the behaviorists and the information processors correspond with their differing attitudes toward organization. The behaviorist press for simplicity, wanting clear relationships and unencumbered theories. They view the organism as an inaccessible black box, and they seek the relationships between the inputs and the outputs of that box by choosing appropriate stimuli and recording appropriate responses, so that the contingencies are manifestly clear. The information processors preferred complex, or as they said, "rich" experimental situations so that the complex structure of man's behavior can be displayed. Evidences for the processes
intervening between input and output were sought usually by obtaining “thinking aloud” protocols from the subjects.

Another suggestive difference, mentioned by Green, between these schools of thought was in the interpretation of the close relationships between learning and problem solving. One school feels that problem solving is but an extension of learning; the other believes that learning is often problem solving in disguise. As Shepard (1964) puts it: “Human subjects who are certainly capable of problem solving and thought do not abandon this faculty when they enter the learning laboratory. On the contrary, in order to deal with the welter of unfamiliar material with which they are suddenly beset in the usual rote learning task, human subjects will resort to any strategy or heuristic device at their disposal.”

Another book which was edited by Henry S. Brinkers in 1972 composes of several essays on decision making. The book, named “Decision-Making Creativity, Judgment, and Systems”, develops in depth a limited number of important aspects of decision-making and decision-making aids while achieving a comprehensive coverage by considering the nature of decision-making and decision-making strategies, the contributions of a variety of disciplines to the development of decision aids, the role of human creativity and judgment in decision-making, and finally, the implications and prospects for the future use of decision aids within academic and professional environments.

Peter C. Fishburn in his essay “Personalistic Decision Theory Exposition and Critique” emphasized the influence of human factors on decision making,
which can be related to the first of another book “Behavioral Decision Making” edited by George Wright in 1985. The first of the book is on individual decision making. John W. Payne investigates how individuals make decisions under risk. He argues that decision making is sensitive to small changes in the decision task and that the decision task is the major determinant of the type of decision taken. Task complexity, time pressure, the way information is displayed, and the type of response required all appear to change information processing and subsequent decision making. In the second part of the book, Small-Group Decision Making, David M. Messick views decision making as a socially interdependent process. He argues that we are sensitive to the outcomes received by others. Another’s good fortune can elate or depress us. Envy is relative! He analyzes the consequence of allowing people to have free access to a valuable but scarce resource that grows at a constant but small rate. If individuals extract too much of the resource, it becomes depleted and so is useless to everyone.

In part III of the book, Organizational Decision Making, George Wright pays special attention to research that has compared Japanese and American organizational decision making and discusses that the decision making processes in both organizations are strongly influenced by the individual culture. David Weeks and Sam Whimster analyze sociological conceptualizations of organizational decision making and go on to argue that “rational” decision making is necessarily linked to an analysis of power, control, and social context. The individual is often part of a small social grouping within
a larger organization, and individual, group, and organizational interests may conflict.

In part V, Improving Decision Making: The Role of Decision Aids, Ayleen D. Wisudha assesses the role of computerized decision aids within the decision-making process and proposes guidelines for the development of these aids. As talking about decision making aids, computer information systems have been used as a major tool to help to make decisions. Stan Davis and Bill Davidson indicate in the book “2020 Vision” that currently we are in an information economy and information can be viewed as a product as other tangible products. But there is one thing needed to be noted that once people get too much information, it may retard the decision making processes and is also a kind of energy waste.

The most current issue on decision making found in this research is “Decision Research-A Field Guide” written by John S. Carroll and Eric J. Johnson in 1990. As stated in the book, the past thirty years have ushered in a “cognitive revolution” in the social and brain sciences. The information-processing approach to human behavior has emerged as a mature alternative to stimulus-response and psychodynamic views. This approach presents people as purposive, reasoning "problem solvers," neither blindly seeking pleasure nor driven by inner passions, but making their own decisions in a complex and challenging world. Carroll & Johnson distill the comments of several theorists and produce the following list of stages: 1. recognition, 2. formulation, 3. alternative generation, 4. information search, 5. judgment/choice,
6. action, and 7. feedback. The authors focus on six criteria of the benefits and costs of decision research: discovery, understanding, prediction, prescriptive control, confound control, and ease of use. The authors also summarize the theoretical and empirical bases of decision research into several aspects:

1. Rational models and cognitive biases. Normative theories of decision making, such as classical economic theory propose that decision makers follow a highly rational procedure for making decision. They assume that decision makers have consistent preferences, know their preferences, know the alternative available, have access to information about the consequences of selecting each alternative, and combine the information according to the expected utility rule, which discounts or weights outcomes by their probability of occurrence.

2. Limited rationality. Thirty years of research in cognitive psychology have revealed that the human mind is limited in attention, memory and calculation. Our short-term memory for what is going on around us can hold only a few “chunks” of information at one time, and moving that information into permanent, long-term storage is difficult. The effects of these limitations on judgment and decision making are quite important. Because we cannot deal with large amounts of information at one time, we tend to simplify situations, to formulate decisions through limited viewpoints that highlight some aspects of the situation but ignore others. We also have developed a great variety of shortcuts, rules of thumb, or heuristics for making reasonably good decisions within our constraints or limitations.
3. It's how you see the problem. People respond to situations as they interpret them, not as they exist in some objective reality. Psychologists talk about the frame that people use to identify decision problems and their components; the same problem in a different frame can elicit a very different response.

4. Heuristics or strategies for decision making. The key feature of heuristics is that they usually do a good job, but not necessarily the best job given the information at hand. They are also easier for an unaided decision maker to employ than highly sophisticated decision rules such as those proposed by economists and management scientists.

5. Tradeoffs are hard to make. Heuristics are valuable because they save effort and facilitate decisions within the constraints of cognitive limitations. They have a second function as well: they allow decision makers to avoid difficult tradeoffs.

6. We are not very self-aware. Although people strive to make good decisions and often have high opinions of their own decision making, research repeatedly shows that decision makers may not understand their own implicit decision rules and are systematically overconfident about the quality of their judgments and decisions.

7. Learning comes slowly, if at all. Because of incomplete feedback, delayed feedback, and uncertainty-sometimes good decisions produce bad results, and vice versa—learning from experience is much more difficult than we realize.
8. Groups are no better. Studies that have directly compared groups and individuals on the same problems find that groups fall prey to the same errors and biases as do individuals. Furthermore, groups have their own characteristic problems, such as a premature tendency to reach consensus, a tendency to become even more extreme over issues where the group has an initial leaning, and a pervasive ability to eat up time and resources. Where groups are useful is in combining bits of information that are not held by any individual, and in providing sheer capacity for work. Groups do not always recognize right answers when they see them, however, or identify experts in their midst. Thus, there is no guarantee that a group will produce a high-quality decision even when knowledge and competency are adequate in the group as a whole.

In the research on meeting planners’ roles, the earliest issue found is in 1979, Leslie E. This’ second edition of “The Small Meeting Planner.” In the book, he wrote that the meeting planners is required to perform in meeting the complex needs of his organization, or one to which he is consultant. There are four major roles: 1. as a presentation specialist, 2. as a planner, 3. as an information coordinator, and 4. as a consultant to management. He mentioned that in a small organization the meeting planner may perform all four functions, whereas in a larger organization the “head of a department’ might well be the consultant to management for planning the meeting while those on his staff design, administer, and conduct the meeting.

In a current issue, “The Essentials of Meeting Management” Richard A. Hildreth has a similar description about meeting planners’ role. He says that a
meeting planner should be a communication specialist with effective knowledge, a manager/planner with administrative skills, an information specialist, and a consultant to management with the problem-solving function and the internal consultant function.

When searching for an instrument to conduct this study, an very important article was found to be valuable. That is “The Context of Decision Making in Organizations: A Factor Analysis” written by Larry W. Boone and Ralph H. Kilmann. The research stated in the article employed the critical incident technique with a sample of 371 organization practitioners and MBA students to empirically derive six factors, represented by 32 items, which impact the effectiveness of decision making in work organizations. The factors are: Multiple Inputs and Alternatives, Problem Identification and Organization, Rewards for Good Decisions, Use of Group Efforts, Bureaucratic Blocks & Politics, and Resource Adequacy. The research has been proved reliable and the incident questionnaire was adopted by Janet Barnard in her research on “Decision Environment of Small Firms Experiencing Different Rates of Growth.” In the study, Barnard examined the decision environments of two types of successful small businesses, firms experiencing rapid growth and those growing more slowly. The response of the CEOs allowed readers to examine a number of characteristics of the decision environments of the firms. Similarities and differences between the two types of companies suggest some observations with respect to the phenomenon of growth and its effect on the successful small business. She found that company health is an important factor, and the
process factors are similar to both categories. However, the rapid growth firms are found to be better managed. The rapid growth firm reported greater attention to the accurate identification and diagnosis of problems, access to adequate and reliable information, the establishment of clear objectives, and support for the implementation process. One could speculate that rapid growth has a positive influence on viable companies, and that is a firm’s state of health that determines whether the challenges of fast growth can be met.
Chapter 3

Tabulation and Analysis of the Data

This pilot study on decision making environment was to find out if there is any significant difference by the positions, geographic locations, and organization styles. The answers of the questionnaires were analyzed by percentages, means, histograms and t-tests. Pie charts and tables are used to help to present the results.

Through the survey, 32 responses were received while two of them were indicated to be not applicable by the individuals'; therefore, the valid responses are filtered to be 30. As shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, the total response rate is 15.24 % while the actually valid response rate is 14.29 %.

Among those 30 respondents, the majority (70%) are female meeting planners (Figure 4) of a number of 21. As shown in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4, most of the participants are over 30 years old, and their years of experiences in meeting planning area mostly spread in the area of 4-15 years. Totally 50 % of the participants have been working at least for 4-8 years in current organizations.

According to general organizational hierarchy, the positions of the participants can be divided into four categories as shown in Figure 5: CEOs (16.67%), managers (43.33%), administrators (13.33%), and meeting planners (26.67%).
Figure 2. Response rate

Figure 3. Valid response rate
Figure 4. Gender of participants

Figure 5. Position of participants
Table 2. Age of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number (person)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 - 35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Years of experience in meeting planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (person)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Years of working experience in current organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (person)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6 shows that most of the participants work for corporations (56.66%), associations (16.67%), and independent meeting planning companies (16.67%). The respondents who are not included in these three categories are put in the fourth category which is a combination of other institutes (10.00%): a college, a government department, and a religious group.

In the first part of the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to consider and briefly describe a work related decision in which he/she was recently involved. Table 5 shows the brief summaries of the answers. Probably because of concerning business secret, there were only 15 participants (50%) answered this question and site selection was the most common answer.

Part II is a set of 32 items randomly arranged and can be divided into 6 factors: Factor 1. Multiple Inputs & Alternatives, Factor 2. Problem Identification & Organization, Factor 3. Rewards for Good Decisions, Factor 4. Use of Group Efforts, Factor 5. Bureaucratic Blocks & Politics, and Factor 6. Resource Adequacy. Table 6 shows the loadings and the means of the items. The loading data was reported by Boone & Kilmann (1991) in their paper “The Context of Decision Making in Organization: A Factor Analysis” to show the intercorrelation of the associated items in each factor. The detail description of each item can be found in Appendix 3. In the table we can see that item No. 1 and item No. 3 about resources have the highest and secondary mean: 4.5 and 4.067. The item No. 11 with a mean of 4.033 is the third. On the other hand No. 17 has the lowest mean 1.800 and is shown to be the least important item.
Figure 6. Organization style

- Out of 30 respondents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Problem summary</th>
<th>Applicable areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Staff downsizing and out-source.</td>
<td>Human resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Placement of registration counter.</td>
<td>On site management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Site selection.</td>
<td>Site selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Whether or not to buy forward on Yen for a program in Japan.</td>
<td>Finance, Company politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Contested a bill with hotel due to poor service.</td>
<td>On-site management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Changing the site of a meeting.</td>
<td>Site selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>To come up with a conference billing procedure.</td>
<td>Company politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Coordinate promotion seminars.</td>
<td>Contracts, site selection programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Factors, their associated items, and the loadings and the means of the items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item number</th>
<th>Loading*</th>
<th>Mean (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Multiple inputs &amp; Alternatives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>4.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>3.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>3.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>3.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>3.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>3.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>3.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problem Identification &amp; organization</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>3.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3.400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>3.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>3.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>3.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rewards for good decisions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>3.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>3.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>3.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>3.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Use of group efforts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-5.80</td>
<td>3.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-5.80</td>
<td>2.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>3.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>3.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>3.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bureaucratic blocks &amp; Politics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>3.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>2.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>3.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Resource Adequacy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>4.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>4.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
<td>1.800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers of the 32 items were grouped into six factors and Table 7 shows the pooled means of the factors. In Table 7, we can see that factor 1 is with a highest mean of 3.763, factor 2 is the second with a mean of 3.439, factor 4 is the third with a mean of 3.411, factor 6 is the fourth with a mean of 3.400, factor 3 with a mean of 3.127 is the fifth, and factor 5 with the lowest mean-3.017 is the sixth.

The answers of these 32 items were also grouped according to certain characteristics of the respondents. These characteristics are organization style, position, and geographic location. Two-tailed two-sample t-tests were used to identify statistic significance. The confidence interval is 0.95 and the significance with a p value (risk level) under 0.05 would be accepted.

As shown in Table 8, four significant differences were found. The first significance, $T = 2.52$ $P = 0.04$, was found between the respondents who work for corporations and the respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies regarding factor 5-Bureaucratic Blocks & Politics. The second significance, $T = -3.64$ $P = 0.0045$, which is also concerning factor 5 is found between respondents who work as CEOs and respondents who work as meeting planners. The third significance, $T = -3.19$ $P = 0.011$, which is found between the answers concerning factor 6, Resource Adequacy, of respondents who work as meeting planners and the respondents who work as administrator. The last significance, $T = -2.28$ $P = 0.06$, regarding factor 5 is found between respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies and the 30 general respondents. It is reported for the p value is close to 0.05.
Table 7. Means of the six factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Inputs</td>
<td>3.767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problems</td>
<td>3.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Rewards</td>
<td>3.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teamwork</td>
<td>3.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Politics</td>
<td>3.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Resources</td>
<td>3.400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Significance found in two-sample t-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Sample 2</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>p ≤ 0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Respondents</td>
<td>Respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies view factor 5</td>
<td>3.210</td>
<td>1.950</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who work for</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corporations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view factor 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Respondents</td>
<td>Respondents who work as meeting planners view factor 5</td>
<td>2.300</td>
<td>3.531</td>
<td>-3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who work as</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEOs view factor 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Respondents</td>
<td>Respondents who work as meeting planners view factor 5</td>
<td>3.250</td>
<td>3.708</td>
<td>-3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who work as</td>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view factor 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Respondents</td>
<td>General respondents view factor 5</td>
<td>1.950</td>
<td>3.020</td>
<td>-2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who work for</td>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td>n=30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>companies view factor 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Factor 5: Bureaucratic Blocks & Politics
** Factor 6: Resource Adequacy
*** 0.10 level
Table 9 shows that the means of the six factor graded by respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies differs from the loadings graded by the general respondents. The mean of factor 5 graded by the respondents from independent meeting planning companies is 1.95 and is far less than the general average of factor 5.

Table 9. Means of the six factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Independent meeting planning companies (Mean)</th>
<th>General respondents (Mean)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>N=30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>3.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.667</td>
<td>3.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.320</td>
<td>3.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.967</td>
<td>3.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.950</td>
<td>3.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.267</td>
<td>3.400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third part of the questionnaire was to ask respondents to choose the top 5 probable problem areas. The general means of the areas are shown in Table 10. Finance is the most probable problem area with a mean of 2.5. Followings are company structure, policies, or strategies-2.100; human resource-1.667; communication & cooperation-1.633, and meeting/exhibition program planning-1.333.
Table 10. Results of questionnaire Part III - the most probable-problem area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Area</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site-selection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liability</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppliers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For respondents working for different organizations, the top five probable problem areas differ. Table 11 shows the top five problem areas for corporation meeting planning: 1. company structure, policies, or strategies; 2. finance; 3. communication & cooperation; 4. human resource; and 5. meeting/exhibition program planning. As to associations, they are: 1. finance; 2. suppliers/contractors; 3. company structure, policies, strategies; 4. human resource; and 5. on-site management. For independent meeting planning companies they are: 1. finance; 2. communication & cooperation; 3. liability; 4. site selection; and 5. human resource. For other institutes they are: 1. finance; 2. meeting/exhibition program planning; 3. on-site management; and 4. company structure, policies, or strategies. There are two areas tie for the fifth: site selection and human resource.
Table 11. Meeting planners’ choices of top five probable problem areas in different organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>General (N=30)</th>
<th>Corporations (N=17)</th>
<th>Associations (N=5)</th>
<th>Independent meeting planning companies (N=5)</th>
<th>Other institute (N=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequence</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Company Structure, policies, or strategies</td>
<td>Company Structure, policies, or strategies</td>
<td>Suppliers / contractors</td>
<td>Communication &amp; cooperation with organization which initiate the meeting</td>
<td>Meeting / exhibition program planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.100</td>
<td>2.100</td>
<td>2.200</td>
<td>2.400</td>
<td>2.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Communication &amp; cooperation with organization which initiate the meeting</td>
<td>Company Structure, policies, or strategies</td>
<td>Liability</td>
<td>On-site Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.667</td>
<td>1.824</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>2.200</td>
<td>2.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Communication &amp; cooperation with organization which initiate the meeting</td>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Site Selection</td>
<td>Company Structure, policies, or strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.633</td>
<td>1.706</td>
<td>1.800</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>2.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Meeting / exhibition program planning</td>
<td>Meeting / exhibition program planning</td>
<td>On-site Management</td>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Site Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.333</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>1.670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other answers generated from the organization information is stated below. However, because of the sample size, this data did not show distinctive meaning in this study on decision environments.

In the 17 corporation responses, 2 of them hold 1-10 meetings, 6 of them hold 11-30 meetings, another 2 of them hold 31-50 meetings, and the other 7 of them hold more than 50 meetings per year. Secondly, there were 13 responses answered that they have no more than 5 employees involved in a/the meeting planning function, while 1 response has 6-10 persons involved, another 2 responses have 11-20 persons involved, and the other response has more than 21 persons involved. Regarding the ages of the corporation, 3 of them are 1-10 years old, 3 of them are 11-30 years old, another 2 of them are 31-50 years old, and the other 9 of them are above 50 years old.

In the five association responses, 3 of them hold 1-10 meetings, another one of them hold 31-50 meetings, and the other one hold more than 50 meetings per year. Regarding the number of employees involved in a/the meeting planning function, three of them have 1-5 persons involved, another one has 6-10 persons involved, and the other one has 11-20 persons involved. There are three of them own more than 5000 members, another one owns 3001-5000 members, and the other one owns 1001-2000 members.

Out of the 5 independent meeting companies, 4 of them answered that their top managers are owners, and one of them answered that their top managers are employees, while two of them said their top managers are part owners. Three of them have 1-5 employees, another one has 11-20 employees,
while the other one has more than 35 employees. Every year, two of them plan 11-30 meetings, another two of them plan more than 50 meetings, while the other one of plans 1-10 meetings. When concerning the age of the companies, two of them are 1-5 years old, another two of them are 6-10 years old, and the other one is more than 20 years old. About the business functions, one of them does only corporate meeting planning; one does only association meeting/planning planning; one does 90% of corporate meeting planning and 10% of private meeting/exhibition planning; another one does 20% of corporate meeting/exhibition planning, 50% of association meeting/exhibition planning, 20% of private meeting/exhibition planning, and 10% of other responsibilities; and the other one does fairly 25% of each functions.
Chapter 4

Conclusion and Recommendation

Good decisions made in an organization determine the success of the business, while a fair and effectual decision-making environment helps to make good decisions.

The theme of this paper is to conduct a pilot study on the decision making environment in the meeting planning industry. A survey was conducted and a critical incident questionnaire which was developed by Boone & Kilmann (1988) and later used by Janet Barnard (1992) in her research - “Decision Environments of Small Firms” was adapted. Boone and Kilmann developed 32 items relating to six factors: 1. Multiple inputs and alternatives, 2. Problem identification and organization, 3. Rewards for good decisions, 4. Use of group efforts, 5. Resource adequacy, and 6. Bureaucratic blocks and politics.

Since each industry is believed to have its own business focus and characteristic, the hypothesis of this study is that the importance of each factor viewed by the respondents in the meeting planning industry within different categories, for example, different position, different organization style, or different geographic location, differs from the general meeting planning industry's perspectives. Also, the meeting planning industry’s perspectives were compared to the small firms' perspectives in the general industries. In this ranking comparison, Barnard's study was used as a data source.
The questionnaires were mailed to 210 samples which were randomly chosen from four states’ members of Meeting Planners International (MPI) for they possess the most members. According to MPI's 1992-1993 directory, we picked 10% of each state’s members which means 82 samples from California, 46 from Illinois, 42 from New York, and 39 from Texas. The total sample number is 210.

After one and a half month’s data collection, 30 valid responses were received. Minitab, a statistic computer program software, was used to process data analysis. Percentages, means, and two-sample t-tests were used for the statistic purpose.

In Barnard’s research, the samples included service, manufacturing, wholesale, and retail organizations; therefore, the results can be regarded as general industries’ perspectives. Comparing to the results which Janet Barnard stated in her research paper on small firms’ decision environments, the meeting planning industry’s ranking of the six factors are different from the results which Barnard found.

It is easy to see in Table 12 that the meeting planning industry has an obviously different view point on the importance of the six factors. In Barnard's study, it showed that the fifth factor, Bureaucratic blocks & politics was relatively the most important factor, while the first factor, Multiple inputs & alternatives was almost the least important factor. To the contrary, the meeting planning industry views the first factor as the most important one and the company politics as the least important one.
Table 12. Means and ranking orders of the results of the study on the meeting planning industry and Barnard's study on small firms (1992).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Meeting Planning Industry N=30 (Rank)</th>
<th>Rapid-Growth Firms N=38 (Rank)</th>
<th>Slower-Growth Firms N=23 (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>3.763 (1)</td>
<td>1.7054 (6)</td>
<td>2.1905 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>3.439 (2)</td>
<td>1.8057 (5)</td>
<td>2.1901 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>3.127 (5)</td>
<td>2.3167 (3)</td>
<td>2.6579 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>3.411 (3)</td>
<td>2.6574 (2)</td>
<td>2.4394 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>3.017 (6)</td>
<td>3.9259 (1)</td>
<td>3.7292 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>3.400 (4)</td>
<td>2.1250 (4)</td>
<td>2.1579 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When considering meeting planners’ roles and tasks, we can easily understand this phenomenon. The meeting planners’ tasks generally concern lots of petty, detail, and important affairs. Their jobs demand organizers and coordinator rather than doers. For them, flexible company politics definitely work better than rigid rules and regulation in accomplishing the tasks. But this does not mean they do not have set politics. However, not like most other industries, they do not need rules that are so exact and thorough to limit their freedom in completing their works. Secondly, meeting planners have lots of contacts with buyers, suppliers, regulators, etc., they need better personal skills and information from all view points and areas to meet these people’s needs. Also, to arrange all the odds and ends perfectly, they desire more tips and information.
than other general industries do. That is why factor 1, Multiple inputs & alternatives, occupies the first place among the six factors.

Even in the meeting planning industry, respondents within different categories have different perspectives. After doing two-sample t-tests of respondents grouped by geographic location, position, and organization style, it is found that geographic difference does not affect the results while positions and organization styles do show a couple of significant differences. In the two-sample t-tests, a 0.05 criterion level was used to test the significance and the significance with a p value (risk level) lower than 0.10 are accepted.

Among the tests, there are four cases found to show acceptable significance. As shown in Table 8, the first significance shown is when respondents who work for corporations grade factor 5, Bureaucratic blocks & politics. It is significantly higher than the grade given by respondents who work for independent meeting planning companies. It is easy to understand that meeting planning is only a subfunction in a general corporation. Corporate meeting planners have to follow the corporation’s politics set for the whole corporation; therefore, could some how be limitations and burdens to corporate meeting planners. For independent meeting planning companies, the main function is to plan meetings. As discussed before, the meeting company politics are comparatively loose and do not form as many troubles for independent meeting planners. However, at a 0.95 confidence interval, the grade on factor 5 of respondents from independent meeting planning companies is significantly lower than corporate meeting planners’ and the general response as well.
Regarding factor 5, company politics, respondents working as CEOs gave significantly lower grades than respondents who work as merely meeting planners. It can be interpreted as that CEOs have higher authority and power which make them not subject to the company politics, so factor 5 does not seem to be a problem to them. On the other hand, respondents who work merely as meeting planners do not have the power and authority over company politics and is consequently subject to the rules and regulations.

The other significance is found in the case regarding administrator's grade on factor 6, Resource adequacy, v.s. meeting planners'. It seems that resource adequacy is more important to meeting planners than to administrators. It could be because that being a meeting planner, he/she would have more uncertainties and complex tasks which need efficient supplemental resources to accomplish. For an administrator, the work tasks would be more predictable and the demand for extra resources would not be as strong. However, these interpretation could be only part of the real causes. Further researches may work out the detail explanations.

In part III of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to choose top five probable problem areas and the results are shown in Table 11. Generally speaking, finance, company structure/politics, human resource, communication, and programming are the most common problem areas. But for respondents who work in independent meeting planning companies, they show special interests on liability and site selection these two problem areas. Besides, for respondents from associations they regard on-site management as one of the top five problem areas.
For each research, there must be some limitations. Maybe they are limited time, other limited resources, or some uncontrollable factors. This research has its limitation, too. Because of limited resources, the sample were only set to be in four states and one meeting planning association. Therefore, it is recommended to adopt the instrument and conduct a thorough survey with more samples from all states and even from other countries. This is ideal, but however, can be done with a sufficient finance support.

Another thing to be noted is the research difficulty. Maybe because of the nature or the peak season of the industry, people tended to be too busy to participate the study. After making one hundred and eighty follow-up phone calls, only 10 more answered questionnaires were received. The success rate was only 5.56%. Therefore, it is recommended to consider a better time for future researches rather than in June and July.

However, the result of this pilot study is thought to be satisfactory, and the researcher hope it could help the industry to have a better understanding of its decision environment and consequently improve it.
REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY


Albrecht, Karl (1988). *At America’s service: How corporations can revolutionize the way they treat their customers*. Homewood, IL: Dow Jones Irwin.


Johnson, Virginia (1992, April). Workforce diversity: Creating a meeting environment where everyone can be productive. Successful Meetings, pp, 122-126.


Appendix 1

Cover Letter A (First Mailing)
June 7, 1993

Dear Meeting Planning Professional,

We are enclosing a questionnaire on "Decision Making Process in Meeting Planning Environment." We would appreciate your taking a few minutes now to complete and return it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. No postage is necessary.

Your contribution to this research study will result in a better understanding of the decision making environment in our industry. In addition, it is hoped that this research will help to provide guidance to meeting planners in evaluating and improving their decision making environments.

It is important for you to realize that your participation in this study is absolutely confidential. The results of this study will only be used in a collective summary. If you would like a copy of this summary, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The results will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Your assistance is invaluable. We would appreciate your response no later than June 20, 1993. Thank you in advance for your immediate response.

Sincerely yours,

Edward B. Stockham, Ph.D.
Department of Graduate Studies
Hospitality & Tourism Program

Johanna Chia-Mei Liu
Research Assistant
Appendix 2

Cover Letter B (Second Mailing)
July 14, 1993

Dear Meeting Planning Professional:

It was great to contact with you. Thank you for taking time to help us complete this research.

The attachment is a 3-page questionnaire on “Decision Making Process in Meeting Planning Environment.” Your contribution to this research will result in a better understanding of the decision making environment in meeting planning industry. It is important for you to realize that your participation in this study is absolutely confidential. The results of this study will only be used in a collective summary.

Your assistance is invaluable and we do appreciate your immediate response. Please send your completed 3-page questionnaire to us through Fax No. 716-475-6401 by July 16. We are looking forward to your response. Thank you again for your kind cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Johanna Chia-Mei Liu
Graduate Student
Appendix 3

Questionnaire
Decision Making Process in Meeting Planning Environment

1. Please consider a work related decision in which you were recently involved, and provide a brief description of the situation below. i.e. a decision made regardless of its success and whether or not an individual or group was involved.

Factors That Impact the Effectiveness of Decision Making
Keeping the decision above in mind, please read the following Boone & Kilmann Decision Making Items and circle the degree to which you agree or disagree with each item. (N/A -> Not Applicable, 1 -> Strongly Disagree, 2 -> Disagree, 3 -> Neutral, 4 -> Agree, 5 -> Strongly Agree)

1. Decision makers have adequate access to equipment like calculators, computers, telephones, etc.  
   2. People who offer good ideas are fairly rewarded.  
   3. Decision makers want to hear different points of view.  
   4. Management provides enough support to carry out decisions.  
   5. People involved in decisions make sure they identify the real problem.  
   6. It is easy to get things done because decision makers know who is in charge and who to ask for help.  
   7. People working on problems have the skills needed to solve them.  
   8. There is a lot of "red tape" to go through before anything can be accomplished.  
   9. People who make good decisions receive the rewards they deserve.  
   10. Decision makers have access to relevant information from all parts of the organization.  
   11. The equipment (calculators, computers, video and conferencing systems, etc.) used to aid decision making in this organization works reliably.  
   12. One, or a few people dominate decisions in this organization.  
   13. This organization has good ways to measure the performance of its members.  
   14. Decision makers appreciate and take advantage of each others' differences, strengths, and unique capabilities.  
   15. Decisions are usually made by individuals, not teams of people.  
   16. The reward system is designed to benefit members who solve the organization's problems.  
   17. There are not enough physical resources such as computing equipment, office space, communication systems, etc. to support good decision making.  
   18. There are too many policies and procedures controlling decisions.
Factors That Impact the Effectiveness of Decision Making

19. Organization members are encouraged to try new ideas. 

20. Changes are usually opposed because they cost too much.

21. This organization often uses special groups like project teams, task forces, matrix groups, and collateral groups to address problems.

22. Adequate rewards are provided to encourage members to offer new ideas.

23. Information about a problem is obtained from many different sources.

24. Information about problems is accurate.

25. There is a lot of political activity when decisions are made.

26. Clear objectives are set for decisions.

27. Decision makers are willing to take some risks.

28. Organization members feel free to disagree with management.

29. People are encouraged to discuss problems with other organization members when making decisions.

30. There are a few powerful people in this organization who always influence decisions.

31. Many possible solutions to problems are generated and considered.

32. Important decisions are usually made by upper management only.

Problem Areas
According to your past experience, please click the top 5 problem areas in your operation and rank those 5 areas from 1 (most probable problem area) to 5 (the fifth probable area).

- Company structure, policies, or strategies
- Human resource (Personnel)
- Finance and budgeting
- Meeting & exhibition site selection
- Meeting & exhibition program planning
- On-site management (i.e. registration on the first day of the meeting, emergencies during the meeting, or communication with facility personnel)
- Transportation arrangement
- Contracting
- Liability
- Communication or cooperate with the organization which initiates the meeting (company or association)
- Suppliers (or contractors)
- Housing for the meeting
- Other (please be specific) ____________________________

Low: 1 2 3 4 5
High: N/A
The information below will be confidential and used for data analysis only. We truly appreciate accurate information in both personal and organizational categories.

Personal Information
Sex: Female _____, Male _____
Age: Under 25 _____, 26-35 _____, 36-45 _____, 46-55 _____, over 56 _____
Years of Meeting Planning Experience: _____ years
Years of Working in the Current Organization: _____ years
Current Position: ________________________________

Organizational Information
Which of the following three categories best describes your organization? Please check only one category and answer the questions in that specific category.

1. Corporation
   * How many meetings (per year) are held in the corporation? ________
   * Number of employees involved in the meeting planning function: ________
   * Age of the corporation: ________ years

2. Association
   * How many meetings (per year) are held in the association? ________
   * Number of employees involved in the meeting planning function: ________
   * Number of members in the association: ________

3. Independent Meeting Planning Organization
   * Top managers (CEOs) in the company are ________ a. owners
     ________ b. employees
     ________ c. part owners
   * Number of employees: ________
   * How many meetings (per year) are planned by the company? ________
   * Age of the company: ________ years
   * What percentage (%) of your current function involves:
     corporate meetings/exhibition planning ________%
     association meetings/exhibition planning ________%
     private meetings/exhibition planning ________%
     other responsibilities ________%

4. Other Institution (i.e. school, government, or church)