

Politics, Governance and Control

The ability for AHP to aggregate (synthesize) and filter (assign roles) is important for several reasons.

Governance and Roles

Power and control are distributed in organizations in a wide variety of ways. An effective decision process must recognize and accommodate the existing governance structure or it will not be embraced.

Control

Because AHP is typically applied to important complex decisions and prioritizations, then politics, governance, and control are important considerations. High level decision makers are often wary of what they might feel is dilution of their control and, to some extent, this is a reasonable concern.

Most if not all other types of models are useful in providing information and insight to decision makers – rather than suggesting the best course of action. However, because AHP and Expert Choice models and evaluations can include *any* qualitative, subjective, intuitive, or emotional factor as well as objective information and hard data, the results of AHP models can, with suitable examination and iteration, be *put into action*. Before this is done, however, decision makers need to be convinced that the computer or model is not making the decision, but that the decision makers remain in control. Not only is this possible but, if applied properly, decision-makers should have even more control than they had when making decisions without using AHP.

This is not difficult to achieve. The hierarchy is a natural way of organizing complexity that most decision makers are comfortable with. The pairwise judgment process is also very natural, and the decision makers can verify that derived priorities for each cluster are true reflections of what they have in mind. Sensitivity analysis (discussed below) provides additional insight and control. The impact of "what ifs" can be easily examined and insights incorporated into the model in the form of additional objectives, restructuring of the hierarchy, some changes in judgments, or a combination of such modifications.

The key, however, is that the decision maker(s) must remain in control and feel confident that they are in control.

In situations where there is one decision maker with ultimate responsibility for a decision, he/she has the option of choosing whether to decide alone, or with some combination of people throughout the organization. Some options include:

1. Making the decision totally alone without consulting anyone
2. Collecting information from subordinates without telling them about the issue, then deciding alone
3. Consulting with subordinates on an individual basis about an issue, then deciding alone
4. Consulting with a group about an issue, then deciding alone
5. Meeting with a group, sharing information, and having the group decide

The quality of the decision as well as decision commitment will vary, depending on the option chosen.

In other situations, decision making authority is distributed among a group of people and option 5 above is the only alternative.

Regardless of the situation, however, AHP provides the ability for a top-level decision maker or decision makers to remain "in control" by reserving the right (role) to make the judgments about the top-level objectives – the ones that drive the decision -- while assigning the roles for evaluating lower-level objectives and alternatives to those throughout the organization who have the most experience and up-to-date, detailed information.

Commitment and Process Buy-In

While it is rare that every participant in a group decision will be happy with the resulting choice or allocation of resources, it is almost always the case that every participant will be satisfied with the process. This is important in getting people to understand and commit to implementing the decision as well as limiting second guessing and endless debate.

The Wisdom of Crowds

In *The Wisdom of Crowds*, James Surowiecki makes a compelling argument and presents numerous examples that, given certain conditions (diversity, independence, and a particular kind of decentralization), the aggregation of judgments of a group will produce better decisions and forecasts than even the most skilled decision maker. Expert Choice provides a process for such aggregation of judgments based on data, knowledge, and experience from people throughout an organization or population.
