

## **A Grounded Theory on Obtaining Congruence in Decision Making**

Michal T. Lysek, Halmstad University, Sweden

### **Abstract**

This paper is a grounded theory on obtaining congruence in decision making. It is a study on how people receive contradictory information, and how they go through the process of deciding which option(s) to select. Sometimes leaders (e.g. officers, managers, etc.) try to engage people in challenging undertakings and present them with goals to follow. Which goals are followed and which are not depends on how they process that information, and what influences their decisions. By better understanding their decision making process, leaders could better learn how to influence people's decisions. Leaders are also sometimes unaware that people often struggle with contradictory choices. The process of obtaining congruence in decision making consists of four stages: struggling, congruencing, deciding, and justifying. The process shows how people resolve cognitive struggles related to contradictive issues. The process is also a complementing theory to other theories on decision making related to psychology, management, and innovation.

**Keywords:** Congruencing, deciding, justifying, struggling, classic grounded theory

### Introduction

In their professions, people have to fulfill certain external expectations. At the same time, they also have a need to fulfill their own internal desires. These external expectations and internal desires can be defined as different objectives, some of which can even be contradictory to each other even if they have a common end goal. To fulfill these objectives, people have to make certain choices (and choose between different options). Those choices depend on their decisions, which make the process one of decision making. However, those decisions depend on finding congruence between their different choices. The main concern of these people in such a situation is to find congruence between certain choices related to their external and internal objectives. If congruence can be found between two or more different choices, then they can all be selected; but if not, then one or some of them need to be prioritized and the others rejected. Thus, the main concern of these people can be resolved by obtaining congruence in the process of decision making.

This grounded theory was discovered in March of 2018, during a special program for participants from the Swedish Armed Forces. A total of 52 officers participated. The lectures were held for eight of them at either the Armed Forces Technical School (FMTS) or the Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Lv.6) in Halmstad, Sweden. For the remaining 41 participants, lectures were held at various regiments and flotillas (air wing, naval station) around Mälardalen, Sweden, including the Air Combat Training School (LSS) in Uppsala, Sweden and the Berga Haninge Garrison (Amf.1) in Stockholm, Sweden. Half of the participants were captains and half were majors. All participants, regardless of rank, were required to write a bachelor thesis as a preparation for the senior officer program (HOP).

After the HOP, a Captain is promoted to the rank of Major or Lieutenant Commander. A Major is promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and a Lieutenant Commander is promoted to Commander. However, since writing a bachelor thesis was a requirement for starting the HOP, the participants enrolled in this special program which covered one methodology course and one candidate thesis. I was involved as one of the lecturers for the methodology course.

My task as a lecturer was to hold two types of lectures conducted in an integrated way, mixing practice with theory, and following a concentrated/focused schedule. One type of lectures dealt with quantitative research and the other type of lectures dealt with classic grounded theory, where my task was to teach and explain the grounded theory methodology in detail, and to compare it with other qualitative research approaches that, in different ways, were inspired by grounded theory. After each lecture, the 52 participants were asked to write a two-page memorandum. No other instructions were given, and no specific questions were asked. As a result, these participants wrote freely about whatever came to their mind. They wrote about how they experienced these lectures, about how they struggled with different concepts, and about how they came to certain conclusions.

Even after some of my lectures in classic grounded theory, the participants still had some misconceptions about the methodology. One such misconception was that they considered classic grounded theory to take time to complete. This misconception came from different sources. Even from me, because I told them that when I did my first classic grounded theory it took me six months to complete. Another reason was because they believed that it could only be done quickly if you know beforehand what it is that you need to study. Thus, they had an agenda, and starting a study without preconceptions did not fit their agenda, their goals, and requirements. And in this case, some of them wanted to study something that could be related to leadership, since officers in their position are in one way or another interested in leadership. Last but not least, the participants were also reading other methodology books during this program, where other researchers, who (possibly) did not know how classic grounded theory works, argued that the methodology was time consuming.

Thus, while I told them that classic grounded theory did not necessarily have to be time consuming, I did not want to just tell. I also wanted to show them. I also knew that they were writing these two-page PMs after each lecture, and while I was not the one who told them to do it, nor was I required to read them, I thought that maybe I could perform a classic grounded theory analysis on these PMs. After all, the participants were writing them without anyone asking them any “forcing” questions, and I did not have any preconceptions of what their main concern would be. More importantly, if I was successful, I could prove to them that classic grounded theory did not have to be time consuming.

### **Methodology**

This study was performed with 52 participants from the Swedish Armed Forces. I used classic grounded theory in order to discover the main concern of the people.

### **Data Collection Process**

This study is based on Glaser’s known dictum that “all is data” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 59). Thus, I collected the two-page PMs that the 52 participants wrote after each lecture

and used it for analysis. I had access to a lot of data, 98 A4-pages for every lecture, and many lectures were given. I also knew that this was much more data than I needed.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Following the tenets of classic grounded theory (Holton & Walsh, 2017; Glaser, 1998, 1992, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I began the data analysis process with substantive coding, which started with open coding and continued with selective coding. One of several purposes of coding when doing classic grounded theory is to create abstract concepts, which is very much aligned with human thinking, because much

of our thinking occurs in the form of propositions, statements that express ideas. All propositions consist of concepts combined in a particular way. For example, 'university students are intelligent people' is a proposition in which the two concepts 'university students' and 'intelligent people' are linked by the verb are. Concepts are [therefore] basic units of semantic memory – mental categories into which we place objects, activities, abstractions . . . and events that have essential features in common. (Holt et al., 2012, p. 342).

After analyzing seven PMs, 16 concepts had emerged. After analyzing another seven PMs, three more concepts had emerged. I continued to analyze more PMs, and when I had analyzed 28 of them, and discovered that no more concepts were emerging after the initial 14, I knew that I had reached saturation. By then, all my concepts were in place and the core variable "obtaining congruence in decision making" had emerged that explained the main concern of these participants. At that time, open coding had ended and selective coding had started.

A switch from open coding to selective coding "allows delimiting the data collection and analysis to just the core category and any potentially related concepts" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 53).

If a concept, regardless of its novelty or personal preference of the analyst, does not have relevance in relation to the core category, it is dropped from subsequent analysis and theoretical elaboration. In this way the core category becomes a guide to further data collection and theoretical sampling. (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 84)

Conceptualization was used to get out of the data and away from full description (Glaser, 2001, 2011). Constant comparison (Glaser, 1965) and theoretical memoing were systematically applied throughout the study and intertwined with theoretical sampling, substantive coding, and theoretical coding. Constant comparison was used to compare incidents (indicators) with each other, and later concepts, and the emerging categories. It was also used for "directing the collection and analysis of data in tandem with theoretical sampling" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 34). Theoretical memoing was done on separate paper sheets in parallel with the data analysis process. Without performing theoretical memoing, theoretical coding would not have been possible to complete.

Once substantive coding was completed, theoretical coding (Glaser, 2005) was started, which "refers to the modeling of the relationships between and among the core category and related concepts as a fully integrated theory. It is the final stage in the coding process" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 86). During the theoretical coding process, the many memos that were collected were also included in the analysis, since they are an

essential part of this process. The final step included the write-up of the paper (Glaser, 2012), during which obtaining congruence in decision making was compared with the literature.

### **A Theory of Obtaining Congruence in Decision Making**

The purpose of performing a classic grounded theory is to discover the main concern of the participants under study. However, the main concern and the core variable are not the same thing. The main concern highlights “the issue or problem that occupies much of the action and attention in the research setting, whereas the core [variable] explains how that concern or problem is managed, processed, or resolved” (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 88).

Two congruence-types were discovered during this study, although more could exist under a different context. These two types could also be referred to as properties of obtaining congruence. They were: “goal congruence” and “knowledge congruence.” “Goal congruence” is related to people struggling with two or more goal-related choices that are conflicting. They can be related to strategic goals set by leaders (as part of *collective congruencing*) (Lysek, 2016) or personal goals (as part of *self-congruencing*) (Lysek, 2016), if those goals are conflicting. Sometimes managers or leaders also present people with two or more strategic goals, without realizing that those goals are contradictory. Conflicting goals therefore create a struggle between external expectations and an individual's internal desires. Such goals not only lead to struggling but often also to cognitive ambiguity. In order to resolve this struggle, learning new things is often required, e.g. by gaining advice or information before the individual can decide upon a certain choice. “Knowledge congruence” is related to people struggling with two or more knowledge-related choices that are conflicting. Such struggling also lead to cognitive ambiguity. In “knowledge congruence,” an individual often struggles with selecting between conflicting knowledge.

The main concern of the 52 officers was to try to resolve their cognitive struggles related to certain issues. The core variable of *obtaining congruence in decision making* goes through four basic social psychological processes: *struggling*, *congruencing*, *deciding*, and *justifying*. These four basic processes explain how people deal with their cognitive struggles related to decision making, and how those struggles are resolved.

And while the process of *obtaining congruence in decision making* seems to be straightforward at first, by going from *struggling* to *congruencing* and then to *deciding* and *justifying*. In reality however, it is an iterative process. Nevertheless, the process always starts with *struggling*.

#### **Struggling**

The term *struggling* relates to when people face two or more conflicting options and they cannot select between those options due to lack of knowledge or lack of determination. Or, they cannot acquire any external help, e.g. guidelines, to make such a decision. Struggling can also occur from a conflict between wanting to make your own choices and feeling pressure being required to make other choices than your own.

*Struggling* also occurs when an individual think that he or she is inexperienced and lacks knowledge; thus, he or she may not want to give certain options a fair chance,

often in fear of failing. Struggling is a consequence of having more than one option to choose from that seem equal to each other, instead of having a single dominating option.

*Struggling* and *learning* affect each other because struggling can cause an individual to increase learning while learning can decrease struggling. Thus, *struggling* and *learning* also belong to the interactive family. However, learning can also lead to a certain amount of *misinforming*, which, in turn, can cause an increase in *struggling*. Lack of understanding or conflicted knowledge can also cause an increase in *struggling*. Thus, the more the individual struggles, the more he or she feels confused.

Nevertheless, learning often helps resolve the struggle in one way or another; it does not matter if it leads to *misinforming* or not because even misinformation can convince an individual that he/she is right. This decision, therefore, lead to *self-reassuring* and *deciding*.

**Ambiguity in decision making.** Cognitive ambiguity as well as confusion occur due to struggling when an individual has two or more conflicting options from which to choose and does not know which would be better suited to his or her needs. Cognitive ambiguity occurs when there is conflicting information about these options, and no way to know if one is better than the other. The individual feels confused not knowing what to believe. Many times, options are subjective. The confusion that comes from not having enough knowledge or experience in making a suitable choice. Selecting the right option requires patience and learning. While struggling can be resolved through learning, learning can also lead to more confusion and ambiguity when affected by *misinforming*. The more an individual feel confused, the more he or she struggles.

### **Congruencing**

*Congruencing* is necessary to resolve a cognitive struggle. However, before congruency can be obtained between two (or more) conflicting issues, an individual first needs to resolve the cognitive ambiguity that is the consequence of these conflicting issues. Thus, the individual often turns to *learning* in order to resolve such a cognitive struggle. And while gaining new knowledge and understanding from external sources helps with *congruencing*, *congruencing* in itself, is a purely internal process. After *congruencing*, the individual often reaches *self-reassuring*, but sometimes also *self-convincing*, and then continues on to *deciding* in order to finally resolve the cognitive struggle.

Two types of *congruencing* were discovered. These two types could also be referred to as properties of this sub-category. They were: *rational congruencing* and *emotional congruencing*. Rational congruencing relates to logical choices made, which include patterns of behavior such as *learning* and *misinforming*, which are explained later in this section. In turn, they often lead to *self-reassuring*. *Emotional congruencing* relates to emotional choices made, which include patterns of behavior such as *emotional captivating*, explained in a later section. *Rational congruencing* and *emotional congruencing* affect the results of *congruencing*.

And while *congruencing* usually starts with *rational congruencing*, it often triggers *emotional congruencing*, and then the two are processed in parallel. Thus, they both need to be processed before *congruencing* can be reached, and before moving on to *deciding* and *justifying*.

### **Self-reassuring**

While *learning* and *misinforming* often become guiding, they also often lead to *self-reassuring*. *Self-reassuring* comes from individuals feeling that they understand (or they believe they understand) a certain issue better and that this choice is a good one, or even the best one for them to take. *Self-reassuring* is affected by either *learning*, or by *misinforming* when it is disguised as learning. It is usually affected by logical and rational thinking but can also be affected by emotions. *Self-reassuring* can lead to excitement, but also to annoyance. *Self-reassuring* is often an effect of maturity and growth for the individual. *Self-reassuring* can also affect *emotional captivating*, which in turn can affect *rejecting*, *partial selecting*, or *selecting*.

### **Self-convincing**

Some choices may also be scary, like giving up control, which often lead to fear (of the unknown) and to more cognitive ambiguity. And when people try to resolve the ambiguity too quickly, they sometimes turn to their own preconceptions and try to force themselves to resolve the cognitive struggle--especially when it feels like a certain choice only leads to a dead-end and selecting a different option may seem better. While it may sometimes work out, *self-convincing* in this way often does not succeed and leads to misinformation instead.

## **Deciding**

In the end, once all the struggling dissipates and congruence is reached, a concrete decision needs to be made. However, whatever choice an individual makes during *congruencing*, the choice is either guided by *learning* or *misinforming* (*rational congruencing*), and it is also affected by *emotional captivating* (*emotional congruencing*). Nevertheless, the process of *deciding* involves patterns of behavior such as *selecting*, *partial selecting*, and *rejecting*.

The choice that a person makes may also seem adamant at times, but it is never set in stone. It can always be changed by either increasing learning or decreasing misinforming.

Once *deciding* has been completed however, the struggle that was caused by having conflicting options finally becomes resolved. People however, often also need to justify their choices. Thus, the next step in the process is *justifying*.

### **Selecting**

*Selecting* is related to selecting a specific issue in favor of another. *Selecting* often occurs when an individual has support for the selected choice from others and from him or herself. In other words, *selecting* depends on (rational and emotional) *congruencing*.

### **Partial Selecting**

Sometimes, when a specific decision leads to rejecting a certain issue, parts of that issue may still be selected. For example, if the issue is related to rejecting a certain methodological approach, some components of that methodology may still be selected (for example when some people chose certain parts from classic grounded theory, without following the tenets of classic grounded theory). This idea is called *partial selecting*.

## **Rejecting**

*Rejecting* is related to not selecting a specific issue. *Rejecting* often occurs when an individual does not have support for the selected choice from others, or when he or she does not believe in the choice. *Rejecting* sometimes depends on a failing with *learning* and may be a consequence of *misinforming*.

## **Justifying**

Decisions made often require justification, where people feel that they need to explain their choices. These decisions are sometimes based on rational or emotional arguments. In both cases, they are based on careful consideration. Sometimes they even act as excuses. Justifications always occur after a choice has already been made. Many types of justifying exist; only some of them are presented here. Thus, the process of justifying sometimes involve patterns of behavior such as *obvious benefitting*, *incongruencing*, *deliberate delaying*, or *distrusting*. The category of *justifying* is also the last step of obtaining congruence in decision making.

## **Obvious Benefitting**

*Obvious benefitting* is an example of a justification to explain why a certain issue was selected. Sometimes, by arguing, there are obvious benefits to gain, either directly (right away) or indirectly (later or in the future).

## **Incongruencing**

*Incongruencing* is an example of an excuse to justify why a certain issue was not selected. It focuses on pointing out issues that are mismatching with the individual's goals. Sometimes the argument is justified, but sometimes it is the result of *misinforming*.

## **Deliberate Delaying**

*Deliberate delaying* is an example of an excuse used as justification to explain why a certain issue has not been selected. It is related to making an excuse for not making a certain choice by arguing that the option to make that choice was received too late. If the choice had been given earlier, then it might have been selected. However, by using *deliberate delaying*, people argue that their process has already come too far, that certain choices have already been made, and it is therefore not possible to go back to make other choices instead. *Deliberate delaying* is therefore sometimes a result of *misinforming*.

## **Distrusting**

*Distrusting* is an example of an excuse used to justify why a certain issue was not selected. *Distrusting* occurs when individuals are skeptical towards a certain issue, such as certain knowledge. Sometimes it is justified, but sometimes it is the result of *misinforming*.

## **External Forces affecting Decision Making**

While gaining new knowledge and understanding is part of an internal cognitive process, and part of *congruencing*, learning itself is gained from external sources and is

therefore part of the external forces that affect decision making processes. Learning can come from external knowledge, but also from advice from others. Learning is thus not a part of the sub-core variables of *obtaining congruence* in decision making, which captures internal processes. Learning can however, affect rational and emotional congruencing, as well as the process of decision making. Emotional captivating is also part of an external force that affects the cognitive process of obtaining congruence in decision making.

## **Learning**

*Learning* is not just theoretical but also practical. Many times, certain issues can only be learned well by doing them (like classic grounded theory). Learning is seen from a broad aspect and includes learning from books as well as from discussions with other people. Learning sometimes leads to courage because the more an individual learns, the more courage he or she gains to take on more difficult issues. Learning also sometimes leads to guiding, and it acts as strategies regarding what choices to make. People seek guidance when they are unsure of what options to take. Guidance also leads to self-reassuring. An example of such guidance that people sometimes seek is structure and control, because the lack of it can lead to cognitive ambiguity, confusion, and fear. Learning can also occur under uncertainty (Lopes, 2010).

*Learning* is not always recommended by others, which can lead back to struggling. However, more often than not, learning helps a person to understand new things, to reason about conflicting issues in a logical manner; it leads to self-reassurance. It also makes the individual reflect on what he or she is actually learning and allows for new thought patterns to evolve. While learning leads to better understanding, it can also lead a person to take a step backwards and make certain corrections in perceptions to move forward again. Learning affects struggling as well as self-reassuring, which makes it belong to the causal-consequence model. While learning and struggling affect each other in a positive direction, learning is also related to misinforming. In turn, misinforming can lead to cognitive ambiguity, which leads to more struggling. Thus, as a result, misinforming and struggling affect each other in a negative direction.

## **Misinforming**

*Misinforming* is related to learning whereas knowledge learned is incomplete or partly or fully incorrect. However, it is always misleading. Misinforming is a consequence of not being aware of having misconceptions or misunderstandings. Fear can sometimes lead to misinforming, especially if that fear is faulty. For example, fear that certain goals cannot be reached; that some option can lead to undesirable results; or that the lack of knowledge or experience will limit the individual's ability to obtain desired results are examples.

*Misinforming* sometimes also leads to guiding an individual in the wrong cognitive direction. Thus, it acts as guidelines regarding what choices to make, but compared to learning, misinforming is always misleading. People may thus be misled intentionally or unintentionally. However, more often than not, people do not know if they are affected by learning or by misinforming. Even if they are misled, they perceive their knowledge to be correct. Perhaps there is no such thing as correct or incorrect knowledge, just more or less adequate knowledge for the situation at hand? Nevertheless, while learning allows people to see possibilities, misinforming often hampers those possibilities instead.



Learning and misinforming can affect each other, since it is not always possible to tell when certain knowledge and information is correct or not. Thus, it makes learning and misinforming belong to the interactive family.

### **Emotional Captivating**

*Emotional captivating* measures how much people find something that they learn about to their liking. *Emotional captivating* belongs to the degree family (Glaser, 1978) since it can be measured from *off-putting* to *appealing* to *captivating*. *Emotional captivating* is therefore about gaining external knowledge. That knowledge can be either *off-putting*, *appealing* or *captivating*. Therefore, these properties of *emotional captivating*, and of *learning* in itself, are not something that is part of the *obtaining congruence in decision making* process. Learning therefore represents an external force that affects the cognitive process of *obtaining congruence in decision making*.

*Appealing* is related to issues that people find emotionally appealing. Anything that has an appealing effect on an individual would fit into this category. Related to *goal congruence*, some goals might feel more appealing than others. Related to *knowledge congruence*, some knowledge might feel more appealing than others. However, most of the time, just because something feels appealing does not mean that the person will prioritize *captivating* before *off-putting*, or vice versa. *Appealing* may affect *self-reassuring* if something else that is *captivating* is not found to take its place. It might also be true that if *appealing* exists then the opposite, *disliking*, also exists. However, *disliking* as a concept was never found in the data, and has therefore, according to the tenets of classic GT (Glaser, 1992), not been added as a category.

*Captivating* is related to people finding an issue very interesting, especially emotionally, and to a much higher degree than just *appealing*. To the degree that it causes the individual to choose a certain issue or goal before another. An individual may become *captivated* when the issue at hand is strong enough to convince or persuade him or her to select it instead of something else. Such *captivation* makes *deciding* during the next step much easier. If some option is found *captivating*, then it will strongly affect *congruencing*, and influence *self-reassuring*. At this point, it will quickly lead to *deciding*. *Captivating* sometimes also requires courage.

*Off-putting* is related to people finding an issue emotionally appealing, but not strongly enough to select it instead of something else. For one reason or another, an individual may choose to *off put* an issue when another seems to be more to his or her liking.

*Appealing* can also affect *partial selecting*, while *captivating* can affect *selecting*. *Off-putting* however, affects *rejecting* and *partial selecting*. All of them therefore belong to the causal-consequence model (Glaser, 1978). Learning is therefore an external force that can substantially affect the process of *obtaining congruence in decision making*. The only question is, in what direction since learning can easily be confused with misleading.

### Theoretical Coding

In the previous sections of this article, the author described the sub-core and sub-sub-core variables of *obtaining congruence in decision making*. In this section however, the author will focus on how these variables relate to each other from the perspective of the theoretical coding families (Glaser, 1978). During this process, the memos that were written from the very start, were compared to the theoretical coding families, and analyzed together with the different categories. Thus, without memos this process could not have been completed.

*Rational congruencing* and *emotional congruencing* affect each other, as individuals often move back and forth between them; they therefore belong to the interactive family (Glaser, 1978). Emotional captivating however represents different degrees of how much an individual is affected by something. Emotional captivating therefore belongs to the degree family (Glaser, 1978).

Whether an individual decides to choose selecting, partial selecting, or rejecting depends on how much he or she is affected by the congruencing process (rational and emotional congruencing). The congruencing process however, is also largely affected by learning. It is therefore possible to influence which choice an individual makes by either increasing learning or decreasing misinforming. Learning, as part of congruencing, is of key importance for the process of *obtaining congruence in decision making*.

Last but not least, *obtaining congruence in decision making* can be seen as belonging to the process family and the interactive family (Glaser, 1978). By moving back and forth between its different sub-core variables, especially between rational and emotional congruencing, *obtaining congruence in decision making* is a part of the interactive family. Nevertheless, *obtaining congruence in decision making* is still a process that starts in one end and moves forward towards the other end, which makes it part of the process family (Glaser, 1978). Most importantly, it also belongs to the mainline family (Glaser, 1978), as a *cognitive status passage*. While status passage is about "moving people along and getting them through" (Glaser, 1978, p. 77), obtaining congruence uses the same concept but mainly on a cognitive level. People have to move along and get through the different stages of this core variable in order to come to certain conclusions and make certain decisions--especially since *rational congruencing* contains elements of interaction between people (for example during learning when people interact with each other). However, the struggles that individuals experience occur on a cognitive level, and the following categories also occur on a cognitive level. Obtaining congruence therefore belongs to the *cognitive status passage* coding family, which is related to *status passage* (Glaser, 1978).

In other words, *obtaining congruence in decision making* starts with *struggling*, where a cognitive struggle between conflicting issues occurs. What is needed is reaching a congruence. Thus, the process continues with *congruencing*. Here, increasing knowledge through *learning* and sometimes *misinforming* leads towards resolving the cognitive conflict. Emotions also come into play when decisions are influenced by what the individual thinks is *appealing*, *captivating* or *off-putting* (see *emotional captivating*). Therefore, in order to resolve their cognitive struggle, people move between these patterns of behavior until they reach a congruence. Afterwards, they move on to *self-reassuring*. Once they have reassured themselves of what would be their best choice, they move on to *deciding*, at which point the cognitive struggle between their conflicting

issues becomes resolved. Finally, once they have decided upon a specific decision or choice, they move on to *justifying* what they have decided to do.

*Obtaining congruence in decision making* is therefore a basic social psychological process that explains how people come to choose between different, and often contradictory, choices. It is also an iterative process that requires going back and forth between its four sub-core variables: *struggling*, *congruencing*, *deciding*, and *justifying*.

### Discussion

This paper represents the first iteration of the theory of *obtaining congruence in decision making*. Glaser (1978), as well as Holton and Walsh (2017), recommended that certain criteria are followed in order to confirm a core variable like this one. These criteria are centrality, frequency, relevance, grab, and variability (Holton & Walsh, 2017).

When the core variable was presented to the 52 participants from the Swedish Armed Forces, they said that they had not been aware of it before, but now that it was presented to them, they recognized that they had been doing this all along. They also said that they could see other people in many other professions or situations going through the same process. Whenever people face different and conflicting options, and they need to decide on which to choose without knowing which one is best. Then they find themselves going through the process of obtaining congruence. From this perspective, the core variable fulfils the criteria of centrality and frequency. It also relates meaningfully to its different categories and explains how the participants' main concern it resolved. And even if conditions in different situations may "vary, the essential meaning remains constant" (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 89).

Thus, *obtaining congruence in decision making* is a process that explains how people come to select between different conflicting issues and how they make certain decisions. It is a basic social psychological process that is central for decision making.

### Literature related to Grounded Theory

Decision making can be applied to different situations and under different context. Holmberg and Wahlberg (2000) presented a grounded theory paper on the process of decision making related to abortion. Since the authors did not mention memoing or theoretical coding, I would argue that the paper is inspired by grounded theory rather than the tenets of classic grounded theory. Nevertheless, Holmberg and Wahlberg's theory differs from *obtaining congruence in decision making* by not necessarily incorporating learning. Their theory presents how individuals react to something that has occurred, and what choices people make based on certain impact factors. They also discuss processing as well as coping. The theory of *obtaining congruence in decision making* however, is the process of how individuals react when given certain goals to choose from, and what choices they make based on congruencing (learning and misinforming). The two categories reactions and *impact factors* in Holmberg and Wahlberg' theory (2000) can be related to *emotional congruencing*.

Another study on decision making was conducted by Lee and Zvonkovic (2014). These authors were also influenced by grounded theory without following the tenets of classic grounded theory because decision making was the main concern of the two researchers and not the main concern of the participants. Nevertheless, in their theory about decision making, Lee and Zvonkovic presented three main categories: *agreement*,

*acceptance*, and *closing of the door*. *Agreement* is about discussing with others and can be related to *learning*. *Acceptance* can be related to *emotional congruencing*, and *closing of the door* can be related to *deciding*. However, in other aspects, *obtaining congruence in decision making* differs from Lee and Zvonkovic's theory and can therefore be seen as complementary to their theory.

Douglas (2006) on the other hand, performed a grounded theory study that focused on employees' perspectives and managers' perspectives on decision making within a company. His theory was however unrelated to the theory presented here because it related to decisions and interactions between managers and employees on a company level; *obtaining congruence in decision making* focuses on individual decisions made on a cognitive level.

*Obtaining congruence in decision making*, and the category *congruencing*, can also be related to Lysek's (2016) classic grounded theory on *collective inclusioning*. Lysek's category *goal congruencing* "has two main patterns of behavior: collective congruencing and self-congruencing. Sometimes they overlap, as they can both be personal and shared by the whole company" (p. 32). However, while *goal congruencing* focuses on how people reach congruency related to either collective or personal goals at the company level, *congruencing* in this grounded theory study focuses on individual decisions made on a cognitive level.

Christiansen's (2006) grounded theory of opportunizing has a category of "weighing up", which is related to decision-making. It is therefore also related to *obtaining congruence in decision making*. However, *weighing up* focuses on how managers chose between different things to do from a practical and company level, while *obtaining congruence* focuses on resolving struggles caused by conflicting choices on a cognitive level. *Obtaining congruence* is therefore only a process that occurs in the mind of people, and how they come to make certain choices; it is not about the physical act of doing whatever they may have decided to do. The same can be said about Lindh's (2011) grounded theory of *reciprocal engagement* (Lindh, 2011) which also relies on *opportunizing* (Christiansen, 2006).

### **Literature related to Psychology**

When people evaluate problems and make decisions, at times they abandon logical reasoning in favor of their own emotions. They trust their gut feelings. And at other times, even if they try to reason logically, emotions still creep in unaware (Holt et al., 2012).

Some researchers therefore believed that our decisions are emotional rather than logical (Camp, 2016). Thus, *obtaining congruence in decision making* concurs with that statement, especially when it comes to *emotional congruencing*. What "feels" to be a correct decision therefore plays an important role in the process of obtaining congruence.

### **Literature related to Management and Innovation**

While not all leaders have to make decisions, some do and on a regular basis. According to Einsiedel, Jr. (1983), such leaders (or managers), have a lot of responsibility, as they have to make decisions regarding everything from corporate goals and objectives to hiring new employees, terminating employees, budgets, purchases, public relations, innovation, and much more. As a consequence, their decisions often

affect many people; the stress involved in making such decisions is often very high. Sometimes they have to make decisions that are problematic (for example, when selecting between an unpopular decision on one hand, and an incorrect but popular decision on the other) (Einsiedel Jr., 1983). Such decisions can be related to *obtaining congruence in decision making*. Choosing between a popular and an unpopular decision is a cognitive struggle that can be related to obtaining congruence. However, Einsiedel, Jr. (1983) also discussed the consequences of certain decisions, while this theory mainly focuses on the process.

Weick (1995) also studied decision making in organizations but from a sensemaking perspective and argued that people can only know what they are doing after they have done it. This statement can also be related to *obtaining congruence in decision making* because the sub-core variable *justifying* is found at the end of this process. As such, it indicates that individuals have already made up their mind; they have already made their decision when they become ready to justify why they have made that decision in the first place--the reason why *justifying* is at the end of this process. However, having *justifying* at the end does not hinder the process of *obtaining congruence in decision making* from moving back to the beginning when for example more learning is required, which occurs when individuals reevaluate their earlier decisions.

### **Obtaining Congruence in Decision Making as a Transcending Theory**

The theory of *obtaining congruence in decision making* is transcending because it can be applied to different substantive areas, beyond the educational context of the 52 participants from the Swedish Armed Forces. It can be used by any type of leaders or managers who either design goals for people to follow or want to educate people while giving them a broad spectrum of knowledge.

Managers sometimes provide their employees with different and often contradictory objectives without realizing it. Thus, these mixed signals hinder employees from reaching congruency. And since managers are unaware of this fact, they believe that when they present a goal to their employees, this goal is uniform. Thus, when a goal is presented in different ways, the message can lead to cognitive ambiguity. And while managers behave in this manner unintentionally, they turn a uniform goal into a cognitive struggle where people need to choose between contradictory options or situations. However, to resolve this problem, people are required to go through the process of obtaining congruence.

This process may occur, for example, when people see growth and innovation as the same thing when they are not (Morris, 2011), or when people confuse incremental improvements with innovation. All the while, managers and employees are not exposed to enough learning to diminish the amount of misinforming that causes a struggle between such contradictory goals. Thus, learning as well as misinforming affect employees' decision on what they should do. And, as a result of their struggle, when facing two or more contradictory goals, employees sometimes chose putting off some of these goals even if they find it appealing. And they decide on selecting the remaining goal (or sometimes only partial selecting it) while rejecting the other. Thereafter, they create justifications that sound rational and logic to suit their decision making.

Therefore, to change employees' decision-making choices, managers have to put more effort into the focus of learning to decrease their own and their employees' level of misinforming. Managers also have to realize that an end goal, as seen from the

perspective of external expectations and internal desires that affect their employees, can offer be interpreted as contradictory. Increasing learning and better understanding how to obtain congruence can thus help their employees to resolve their cognitive struggles.

### **Conclusion**

Leaders (e.g. officers, managers, etc.) sometimes present people with not just one goal, but two or more goals that can be contradictory. More often than not, these leaders are unaware of that fact. For example, the 52 participants from the Swedish Armed Forces were given two goals: one to complete a bachelor thesis based on certain requirements, and the other to complete a methodology course necessary to complete their bachelor thesis. When these participants learned about classic grounded theory, they realized that their thesis requirements were contradictory to the grounded theory research design. As a result, they were presented with two different goals that became contradictory. From this study, the grounded theory on *obtaining congruence in decision making* emerged.

Therefore, as people in different professions have to fulfill various external expectations, they also have a need to fulfill their own internal desires. These external expectations and internal desires are sometimes contradictory with each other even if they have a common end goal. Thus, people go through the process of *obtaining congruence in decision making* in order to resolve their main concern, which is to find congruence between different choices related to their external and internal objectives. If congruence can be found between two or more different choices, then they can all be selected. If not, then one of them need to be prioritized and the others rejected.

The theory of *obtaining congruence in decision making* is a basic social psychological process that explains how individuals resolve their cognitive struggles when facing two or more contradictive options or issues. *Obtaining congruence in decision making* goes from *struggling* to *congruencing* and then to *deciding* and *justifying* throughout this process. In so doing, the theory explains how people's choices in their decision-making process can be influenced or even changed by increasing *learning* or decreasing *misinforming*: two external forces that affect the cognitive process of obtaining congruence in decision making. Obtaining congruence therefore contributes to the existing literature on decision making, but also to decision making in psychology, management, and innovation.

A possible limitation of this study is that it focuses on the cognitive process of decision making and outlines the four sub-core variables involved in this process, but it does not describe very much about how people restart this process after a decision has already been made. It only mentions that the process can be restarted when people discover new knowledge, but not how (from a process perspective) their previous decisions are changed when this happens. That could therefore be a possible future study.

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