Two major forces driving current organizational decision-making strategies are a necessity to make faster, better decisions and the use of teams in making those decisions. Although both are driven by demands from the organization's internal and external environments, they are not necessarily compatible strategies. Making decisions in a team enhances the likelihood that these decisions will not only incorporate multiple perspectives but that new levels of understanding will develop (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In reality though, the higher quality team decision is often made at the expense of speed, as team decision-making cycles are generally shown to be longer than those of individual decision makers (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). As a result, the organizational development literature has suggested that as organizations foster the development of teams, they simultaneously develop new methods of team decision making, including the use of intuition (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990).

Expert teams are described from the cognitive standpoint of shared mental models (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993) and the social aspect of cohesiveness (Cartwright, 1968). Group cohesiveness is a widely studied phenomenon, which is developed through the conditions promoting interdependence of group task work, teamwork, and pride in and identity of the group (Cartwright, 1968; Festinger, 1950; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988). Cannon-Bowers et al. (1993) proposed that shared mental models also form from the expectations of shared teamwork and team tasks and are based on team members' collective knowledge, experiences, and skills. Both cohe-
siveness and shared mental models describe a level of development in which groups become interdependent in accomplishing their task.

Newell and Simon (1972) examined the relation between intuition and shared mental models. While studying differences between expert and novice chess players, they found a strong correlation between the quality of mental models and the level of proficiency. This expertise was dependent on content-specific knowledge about the task; however, an equally important aspect was the expert’s ability to access and use the knowledge in ways that were more efficient than that of the novice. Simon (1983) described this efficiency in accessing and using the knowledge in mental models as intuition. If shared mental models can be considered a group-level representation of mental models, then the research associating intuition with highly developed mental models can be extrapolated to explain shared mental models as the construct by which teams make intuitive decisions.

The data for this research on intuitive team decision making was derived from interviews with five cohesive teams involving a total of 22 individuals: The teams came from health care, a consulting firm, a privately held corporation, and two governmental agencies. All were asked to recall and then asked questions about a decision that “just seemed to happen” or “a difficult decision where there was initially a struggle to get a perspective and then the answer just seemed to be there.” The data was analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Intuitive decision making is at first glance difficult to distinguish from a cohesive team’s routine decision-making processes. Teams are able to describe an intuitive decision they have made, yet the terminology and some of the activities resemble what I consider to be analytical, nonintuitive decision making. However, close analysis reveals some distinct conditions and activities of intuitive decisions.

When a team is faced with a decision event, they intuitively compare the event to the knowledge in the shared mental models. If the event can be understood by this comparison, the team implicitly knows the solution and is able to rapidly reach intuitive consensus. The decision is described as something that just happened, an agreement to just act, or something that the team just knew. The team reaches consensus with limited discussion of the decision event. If they do suggest different courses of action, they do not stop and evaluate each one.

Discussions and evaluations do play a role in intuitive team decision making; however, they largely take place after the decision is made. The intuitive decision is followed by a period in which the team both validates the decision and concurrently plans the course of implementation.

The model of intuitive decision making in cohesive workplace teams (Fig. 11.1) is shown as having distinctive steps, yet intuitive team decision

![Diagram](image-url)
making is holistic in nature. A holistic experience is characterized by the awareness of an overall pattern without being able to explain the individual components of the pattern. It has no sequential steps, is experienced rather than conceptualized, and known rather than rationalized (Gardner, 1985).

Team members experienced their intuitive decision in a holistic fashion. They did not describe the intuitive decision as a process that started at "A" and ended in "B" but rather as something that just happened, something they just knew, or an action they just took.

Yet each team was able to describe significant common experiences and knowledge that served as cues to activate their collective intuition. The actual act of intuitive team decision making is made without specific verbal reference to the team’s common knowledge and experience. However, when team members were asked to describe what was happening as they made the decision, they were able to elucidate thoughts, feelings, and factual knowledge.

ROUTINES

The routines that are associated with intuitive team decision making largely center on the ways in which teams communicate with one another. This communication is often informal, as when team members tell one another about projects, discuss work problems, or ask for advice. More formal communication occurs during meetings when teams follow a planned agenda and share information that is specific to an agenda item.

The literature (Corner, Kinicki, & Keats, 1996; Kim, 1997) has described the reinforcing roles of communication and shared mental models.

Teams use different processes to communicate with one another and build or reinforce shared mental models. One team described keying off of one another. One person thinks of something and another builds on it. Members of another team use each other as sounding boards for new ideas, situations, or problems. No matter how the communication process is described, the end result is the same: a greater common understanding of the team goals, identity, and norms.

SHARED MENTAL MODEL: TEAM NORMS

Cohesive workplace teams have a shared mental model of team norms that are most concisely described as behaviors that team members expect one another to exhibit. Team members described norms such as honesty, trust, respect for others, accountability, empathy, belonging, and open communication. Coming to consensus was consistently mentioned as a decision-making norm.

When team members have a shared mental model of their norms, they foster an environment that enables them to work interdependently to achieve their goals. For one team member, a norm means something as simple as team members being able to count on one another. In other teams, the shared mental model of the team norms may be instrumental in making an intuitive decision. One team from a governmental agency intuitively selected a new team member because they felt the applicant would best fit with the team. They intuitively recognized that the candidate's values were very similar to those of the current team members.

SHARED MENTAL MODEL: TEAM GOALS

Cohesive workplace teams have a shared mental model of goals that are closely aligned with the vision or philosophy of their team. The shared mental model of team goals includes common understandings about the objectives that the team is trying to achieve. It is also comprised of common understandings about the tasks and experiences that have helped them achieve or prevented them from achieving these goals. Unless the vision or purpose changes, the shared mental model of the goals does not change. However, the shared mental model of how to achieve the goals will change as the team shares new experiences and tasks.

The shared mental model of the goal is the most predominant shared mental model described in relation to intuitive team decision making in explaining why their professional oversight team did not adopt a survey that was being adopted in other parts of the country, a team member of a governmental agency said, "Our gut feeling was that it is not going to work. They would rather have us come in for an hour and get this over with rather than sitting there spending an hour or 2 hours filling out paperwork and then sending us a stack of paper because they don’t know what we want or what we are asking for."

SHARED MENTAL MODEL: TEAM IDENTITY

The identity is either aligned with and therefore a close resemblance to the identity of the system in which they reside or a special niche that is perceived to be superior to their referent groups. The special niche is often commonly understood as the exceptional manner in which the team meets their goals, and it is therefore not always easy to differentiate the identity from the goals.
Whatever the source, decisions will be made that intuitively reinforce that identity. A team member from a privately held corporation depicted this concept when she talked about the selection of a team logo. “I don’t think any of us said out loud ‘I want to be proud of this because it represents us,’ but certainly that’s what we were going for and I wanted it to be dignified and yet bright and eye-catching. Those weren’t things we said out loud, but I think just intuitively we all knew.”

**EXPERT TEAM/INDIVIDUAL EXPERT**

Supported by and supporting shared mental models is the concept of the expert team. The expert team is formed when the knowledge and experience of the team has reached a level at which the whole team is considered an expert. They know the expectations and roles of the team and one another. They operate fairly autonomously, yet with an understanding of their role within the larger system/organization. They have committed themselves to working as a team to achieve their goals. They are able to reach consensus on the majority if not all of their decisions.

Embedded in the expert team is the expert individual. This team member has extensive knowledge or experience about a certain aspect of the work of the team. The expert is expected to share that information to educate the other team members. One team member from a governmental agency provided an example of how the individual expert operates within the expert team. “So much of what we do is governed by laws and civil service laws and that system’s rules. Something for me that might come by itself, something that I might have experienced that you haven’t, or something you have experienced that I haven’t. I talk with you and share the knowledge that we have instead of reinventing the wheel each time."

Drawing on the expert–novice studies of intuition (Simon, 1983) as a model for intuitive team decision making, the expert team has developed strong shared mental models that cause them to intuitively understand an event in relation to prior events they have experienced together. Collectively understanding the event allows each team member to make an intuitive decision that is the same as his or her teammates.

**INTUITIVE SKILLS**

The use of intuition during team decision making is represented by a variety of intuitive skills that are based on Cappon’s (1993) anatomy of intuitive skills and Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ (as cited in Benner & Tanner, 1987) six key aspects of intuitive judgment. Because intuition is largely outside of conscious awareness, the team members act without realizing they are doing so.

However, in the team setting, they are described from a collective standpoint. One team member related an example of this collectivity. “The thing that impressed me was that again we, the four of us, independently all saw the same thing.” Four new intuitive skills—just knew, just happened, just acted, and creation—were defined directly from this research. Although intuitive skills permeate all steps of team intuitive decision making, some are more closely aligned with a certain part of the intuitive decision. Figure 11.2 shows the relation of the intuitive skill to a particular step.

**INTUITIVE UNDERSTANDING**

Using one or more intuitive skills, the team compares the decision event to their shared mental models. If the event can be understood by this comparison, the team implicitly knows the solution and implicitly makes the decision. They do not engage in common team decision-making tasks such as clarifying the goal, evaluating the alternatives, or collecting more information. They immediately and collectively come to consensus about a course of action.

When the newest member of a consulting firm raised the question, “What business are we in?,” the team members all intuitively realized there was a dissociative match between the work they were doing and the shared mental model of the vision and goal of the firm. According to one member, “I knew this is what we needed to do and what we wanted to do and I knew intuitively if we didn’t do it, we’d never build our business.”

By intuitively putting themselves in the place of the facilities they surveyed, an oversight team from a governmental agency understood a new survey in relation to the shared mental model of their goal of establishing realistic regulations for their clients. When members of a team from health care discovered a serious clinical error made by a nurse, they intuitively realized the salience of the incident, describing it as a “red flag” in relation to their shared mental model of how to provide exceptional clinical care and safety. They also intuitively understood the patterns of the relations between the error, their experiences with this person, and their knowledge of established clinical routines.

**RISK**

Although only one team that was interviewed for the research specifically mentioned risk, there was an element of risk in the intuitive decision that four teams described. In analyzing the risk aspect of intuitive decision mak-
11. INTUITIVE TEAM DECISION MAKING

SITUATIONAL SHARED MENTAL MODELS

Shared mental models also provide the basis for the construction of another more dynamic type of mental model: the situational shared mental model. When an event cannot be completely understood by intuitively comparing it to the shared mental models, the cohesive team still has an opportunity to make an intuitive decision. They will attempt to construct a situational shared mental model of the piece they do not understand. If they are successful, they can rapidly reach intuitive consensus.

During the construction of a situational shared mental model, the team members may suggest alternative courses of action. They do not stop and evaluate any one alternative but instead share information to clarify the decision event. When the right course of action is suggested, the team instantly and collectively agrees to it. A team member from a privately held corporation succinctly described this process. "I think that we had talked ourselves through it and knew pretty much what we wanted by the time we got to it conceptually."

The dynamic relationship between the expert team and the individual expert plays an important role when building situational shared mental models. The information shared by the member who has the most knowledge or expertise about the event will sometimes intuitively be perceived as more salient than information shared by team members with less expertise.

INTUITIVE CONSENSUS

Intuitive team decision making is characterized by an ability to speed up decision making and quickly reach a decision. The team from the consulting firm epitomized the speed of intuitive team decision making when within 3 minutes maximum they said, "Of course, we are not in that business anymore." Yet although the decision was fast, it was not made without a shared mental model. As one team member related, "God knows we had been thinking about it and talking about pieces of it before we met. But the decision to just drop it was in those 3 minutes for me."

Intuitive consensus is not reached by negotiating disparate views; these disparate views are already incorporated into the shared mental models. Rather, intuitive consensus occurs when the team uses one or more intuitive skills to understand the event by comparing it to the shared mental models. The team instantaneously and collectively reaches an agreement and implicitly and explicitly agrees to support it.

Intuitive consensus is commonly described as just knowing, just happening, or agreeing to just act. Participants from two different teams described it as almost being a nondecision but with no question that they would be proceeding with it.
VALIDATING AND IMPLEMENTING THE INTUITIVE DECISION

According to Agor (1986), when people make an intuitive decision, they often try to disguise the fact that it was made intuitively. They do this by collecting information after the decision is made and then using that information to justify it to others. A team follows this pattern, only they also validate the decision to one another. Validation brings the commonly shared knowledge into conscious recognition, thereby confirming that the decision is consistent with the shared mental models from which the decision was made.

At this point, the team also designs the implementation of the decision. Validating and implementing are closely interwoven because as the team plans the implementation, they simultaneously reinforce the decision they made. The intuitive skills that teams use at this stage include forward thinking, that is, envisioning what will happen next, finding creative ways to think about or implement the decision, and knowing how to best apply the decision.

During the validation period, risk is recognized and cognitively reduced. Although the riskiness of the decision is sublimated at the time the decision event is assessed, it is discussed as the team begins to validate the decision.

SUMMARY

From an organizational standpoint, the value of this model will be in “teaching” teams to make intuitive decisions. This will involve guiding teams in the development of certain skills as well as teaching them to recognize the significant cues of an intuitive decision. Because intuitive decisions are made outside of conscious awareness, teams cannot be taught to make intuitive decisions. They can, however, learn to develop the strong shared mental models that enable intuitive decision making.

Because communication is necessary for the development of strong shared mental models, teams will need to learn basic communication skills such as active listening, fashioning an argument, and representing personal viewpoints. Once these skills are in place, teams can be taught to use dialogue as a means of questioning assumptions and developing a deeper understanding of one another’s viewpoints, roles, and experiences. As they begin to develop these understandings, they will begin to establish norms and come to agreement about the values they expect one another to exemplify. They will devise and commit to communication routines that support and enhance their existing communication channels.

Teams must have a strong goal based on the vision and purpose of their work as well as their relation to and role in the larger system. They will develop evaluation tools to help them assess how well they are achieving these goals and skills that will enable them to continually assess the basic assumptions of the goal.

Teams should be taught the more traditional methods of team decision making. As they become comfortable with these patterns, they will begin to learn how they might also be able to make intuitive decisions. They will learn the following:

1. How and when to share unique or commonly held information and develop trust in one another’s knowledge and expertise.
2. To recognize the antecedent conditions of an intuitive decision: a high level of uncertainty, multiplicity of solutions, little previous precedent, and short time frame.
3. To understand the role of risk in a decision.
4. To recognize when the team has made an intuitive decision and raise important issues about the decision while simultaneously planning the implementation.

REFERENCES

