

Analysis and Design of Advice

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Preface

To the advisor, an analysis of advice should hint at what to suggest and how to do so. To those who receive advice, it should help them decide how to respond to suggestions.

How we analyze advice affects fundamentally the way we understand the state of affairs as it is and might be, who decides these questions, and how we choose what can, ought to be, and is done. It influences what we believe and do, our perception of whom is of similar or different knowledge, authority, and our conception of desirable or undesirable positions within culture, politics, economics, and industry.

This book offers a general way to analyze advice. The analysis applies regardless of what advice is about and whom it comes from or needs to be given to, and is in this sense general. The analysis is made of two intertwined parts, a conceptual analysis and the analysis of the rationale of advice.

Communicated in an attempt to more or less precisely refer to concepts, objects, and the relations between these, advice aims to convey information about conditions, events, and situations to influence decisions. *Conceptual analysis* concentrates on the difficulties in understanding advice and making it understandable in intended ways, why these issues arise, how they manifest themselves, and what to pay attention to when choosing what to advise and how to do so. The rationale of advice is the assumptions on which it is based and the goals which it should achieve for the advisor or the decision-maker who receives it. *Analysis of the rationale of advice* aims to define and describe assumptions and goals, and from there determine whether advice is appropriate within a given decision situation, how robust it is with regards to criticism that may be directed toward it, and how it relates to the choice expected of the decision-maker who receives it.

The introduction is followed by a chapter that develops and defends the argument that the way an individual analyses advice influences the way he coordinates with others, and thereby his position within mechanisms of coordination, such as markets in economics and polyarchies in politics. Chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated to the conceptual analysis of advice and Chaps. 5 and 6 to the analysis of the rationale of advice.

The premise that giving advice is a *design problem* is central to this book. This means that advice is seen as an artifact, as information communicated by an advisor to a decision-maker. This information can and ought to be designed, its properties

decided on the basis of an understanding of the context in which it is given, the decision problem and the decision-maker it targets, what the decision-maker may know or ignore, and meet the objectives of the decision-maker and of the advisor. The design of advice is a goal-oriented activity that can be approached in a more systematic way once there is a grasp of the unavoidable difficulties commonly encountered both by the advisor and by the decision-maker, as well as of the feasible responses thereto. For the advisor, the analysis of advice is a method for the resolution of the problem that he faces, which is what advice to give and how to do it. For the decision-maker, it is a method to evaluate the advice that he receives.

This book was originally intended for undergraduate and graduate students of management science, as many of them go on to become professional advisors. Fields such as operations research and finance already teach them the methods that they can apply to make recommendations, especially when they can collect or already have quantitative data. These decision-making situations are, so to speak, well structured: they are the ones in which much rigorous thought was already invested, for which agreed-upon instruments of measurement have been defined and used to desirable results, where a solid body of knowledge is already available and ought to be applied to come up with a recommendation. However, many decision situations are not as convenient. The intention in this book is to offer a general method of analysis that applies to the giving and receiving of advice when the decision problems are not well structured and in which there are variously imprecise, unclear, incomplete, or conflicting qualitative information.

The reader is not expected to have the specific knowledge that management science students acquire before they are confronted with the issues raised here. By aiming for a rigorous discussion, commitment is expected for the ideas to be understood to the point at which they can be used, criticized, and hopefully built upon and revised. This is especially the case toward the end of the book, when mathematical models of advice are introduced. They are, as most of the ideas here, built from grounds up, in small and simple steps.

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