

THE STRATEGIC CHOICE APPROACH IN TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

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ABSTRACT: In associations, strategic decisions are generally made during meetings at which problems that are not common to all members are often presented and discussed. So, this situation can favor conflicts and disappointments among members. Thus, tracing the path trade associations should follow in the decision-making process to increase the participants' satisfaction level must be investigated and evaluated. This includes developing a group decision-making model based on the Strategic Choice Approach (SCA), enabling decision-makers to be more flexible and secure about the decision-making process. This approach helps to clarify the situation under analysis in a systematic way. A case study was undertaken to determine the environment, the information required, and the implications of the decisions of a Trade Association. The results show that greater attention was paid to operational actions and focused on its members' interests with the specific objective of increasing sales. In addition, the results show that, while decisions were generally characterized as long-term strategic thinking, they can be described as having an operational role.

Keywords: Business, Group Decision-making, Strategic Choice Approach; Associations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of the organizational decision-making process has led to the search for models that can be shown to meet each organization's specificities. For example, the decision-making structures of organizations that are hierarchical and are defined and managed in a patriarchal way are centralized. On the other hand, there are non-hierarchical organizations. In this perspective, among the different types of organizations, associations deserve special attention concerning how they make decisions because they cannot be classified as being either entirely hierarchical or entirely non-hierarchical organizations. Furthermore, although members of a particular association share a defined purpose, they generally do not work in the same organizational environment. Thus, they are exposed to different cultures and companies with varying employees, financial resources, technologies, etc. This represents a challenge when the Association requires its members to participate in decision-making processes.

There is substantial literature on individual and group decisions, characterized by searching for methods and techniques that better assist the decision-making process. For example, Saad, Sejean, Greengross, and Cherkas (2019) stated that for nearly five decades, behavioral decision theorists had led the concerted efforts to understand the cognitive processes inherent to human decision-making, including how individuals search for information before making a choice (a central feature of many types of decisions). However, studies on the decision-making process in associations are limited.

In general, decisions in associations are made in meetings where problems that are not common to all members are presented and discussed. Although the members are part of the Association, they influence and are influenced by the outcome of the decision. By investigating group decision-making in associations, this study sets out to understand the strategic and representative roles of Trade Associations (T.A.). Furthermore, exploring associations and linking this study to theories about decision-making will lead to a complete view of this organizational environment, thereby contributing to the decision-making process and the training of future members in collaborative decision-making in a T.A.

Thus, to better understand this process, a decision-making model needs to be developed that meets T.A.'s universal and intrinsic specificities. In this view, it is possible to create a model based on the Problem Structuring method (PSM) concepts to support group decisions and the negotiation of conflicts. One approach to understanding a

T.A.'s strategic role is the Strategic Choice Approach (SCA) (Friend; Hickling, 2006). Among other benefits, the SCA enables tangible solutions to be identified that consider internal and external issues involved in the problem. Furthermore, it is a flexible approach that accepts quantitative and qualitative data. In their results, the authors show a planned contingency that presents decisions to be taken now, both in the present and others that are left open until specified times in the future (Friend; Hickling, 2006).

Consequently, the SCA enables a strategic plan to be constructed that facilitates the implementation of actions obtained. Studies of the SCA are very widespread in the literature. Researchers have searched for answers and problem-solving support, such as the matrix of correlation of problems (Wang and Zhang, 2013); optimization problems (Singh and Singh, 2017); planning methods (Diller and Oberding, 2017); architectural drawing tools (Todella, Lami and Armando, 2018) and financial systems (Schotten and Morais, 2019).

The group decision-making model proposed was applied in an actual situation in a T.A. located in Brazil. The main contribution of this paper is to direct the T.A.s themselves in the search for a decision-making model that better meets the expectations of the associations and their members. Knowing the strategic path will direct T.A.s towards making it better known what behavior is expected from members during the decision-making process. In this way, decision-makers (D.M.s) optimize and add value to their role. Once consolidated, the approach can be applied by the D.M. and to various associations or institutions that fit the group decision process. The outcome of the procedure is for recommendations to construct a path for decision-making by a T.A. This path will contribute to more effective and stable decision-making, reduce uncertainties within the process, and provide more excellent participants' security. It should also be noted that the operation can be applied to any association when adapted to each organizational segment's specificities.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a brief review of the literature on approaches to strategic decision-making, presenting concepts and applications of the group decision-making process, its implications, information needs, and decision-maker's behavior. Section 3 presents a methodology and a brief report on the working group chosen as a reference point for developing a solution to setting a better path for strategic decision-making. Section 4 presents the research results and application of the SCA methodology, following Modeling, Design, Comparison, and Choice. Section 5 presents the results, the management implications for the Board of Directors of the T.A. in the case study, some limitations of this study, and some suggestions for future lines of research. Finally, Section 6 draws some conclusions and offers some final remarks.

II. A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON APPROACHES TO STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING

Choice management and the behavioral perspective

Tan, Chai, Wang, and Liu (2012) presented that the earliest research on enterprise operational decision-making problems dates to the 1950s. The authors claim that at that time, people mainly used the mathematical optimization method to model and analyze production planning, resource allocation, inventory control, and other similar problems. By extracting objective functions, decision variables, and constraints of these problems, the optimization method can build Operational Research models and solve them by optimization theory.

Among the studies published about organizational strategies and decision-making, three aspects can be emphasized: the behavior of and influences on working groups; the need for information; and the strategic character of the decision-making. Firstly, behavior and influences on working groups have been tackled by Annosi, Marchegiani, and Vicentini (2020), Chao et al. (2021), Chen et al. (2017), de Grip, Fouarge, and Montizaan (2020), Hall (1999), Kunc and Morecroft (2010), Maitland and Sammartino (2015), and Weber (2019). These studies demonstrate that influences on workgroups and ethical and behavioral issues are inherent to the decision-making process. From a macro perspective, the analysis of impacts in the decision-making process focuses on understanding influences from a strategic perspective and identifying events, organizational and individual factors that drive corporate strategies.

The issues considered in these studies for understanding the influence in the decision process extend to identifying results in groups with decision-making powers, the adequacy of business lines to strategic behavior, structure, resources, decision processes, interactions, conflicts, relationships, and ethical issues. In this perspective, Kouamé et al. (2015) examine the extent to which both positive and negative affective diversity is positively related to managerial decision performance.

Decision influences also happen when they are made explicit to the decision group. According to Wang and Li (2015), group decisions occur when several stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process, and the final choice is seen necessarily to have taken into account the opinions of all stakeholders. In the view of Gelvez and Melon (2016), when making a group decision, D.M.s recognize the need to understand who will be affected by their choices and actions and who has the power to influence results. The authors state that it is helpful to consider the importance and influence of all interested parties. They also claim that group decisions result from members' preferences and processes to reach a consensus. Decision-making processes are affected by various factors, including members' knowledge, the extent to which they trust each other, and the strength of their personalities. Finally, these

authors comment that the concepts of influence and consensus are relevant to the decision-making processes in which individual behavior affects how quickly results are obtained.

The existing literature on group decision-making suggests that individual and group decisions are not only different, but the extent of their usefulness can also be based on various cognitive, social, and contextual influences.

The existence of conflicts during the group decision-making process was the subject of studies by Xie and Xie (2017). The authors concluded that in real-world policy formulation, policy changes that implement new ideas generally required collective decision-making by stakeholders with different beliefs regarding the concept's effectiveness. In such situations, the polarization of opinions was expected to create conflicts, with certain parties opposing the implementation of some ideas.

Still, in the behavioral context, it is essential to understand how people make decisions. Somarathna (2020) considers that decision-making in a complex system could be challenging for the human mind without proper decision support. Within this same concept, Edwards et al. (2004) affirm that human decision-makers cannot manage large amounts of information in short periods and are open to making inappropriate and inconsistent decisions.

Blondiau and Reuter (2019) point out that people fundamentally use different modes of decision-making, and these authors reviewed studies that identified patterns of calculation, recognition, or affect, thereby highlighting the tendency of individuals to make their choices in a very rational way, automatically through associations with other similar situations or based on emotions. The authors concluded that these modes of decision-making shaped their results. Understanding how the group organizes itself provided a methodological path for this study. The aim was to understand the group's expectations concerning the decision process adopted in the T.A.'s operational activities.

The second issue considered in this research is the need for information in the decision-making process. This need was explored by Merigó, Casanovas, Yang (2014), Villiers, Woodside, Marshall (2016), Kauppila, Bizzi, Obstfeld (2017), and Lhazmir, Oualhaj, Kobbane, Mokdad (2020). These studies concluded that decision-making processes need to be concerned with how D.M.s prepare for the decision, and thus this makes the decision complex and full of uncertainties. Lin (2006), Lovreglio, Ronchi, Nilsson (2016), and Moallemi, Elsayah, Ryan (2018) developed a relevant study on uncertainties in the decision-making process. Moallemi, Elsayah, and Ryan (2018) claim that several approaches in the exploratory modeling literature - each with strengths and limitations - have been introduced to address the complexity and uncertainty of decision problems.

Chetouane, Barker, Oropeza (2012) conceptualize that a growing concern of decision-makers when dealing with decision making, especially when dealing with system design, is the preparation for a wide range of potentially uncertain operational conditions. In this case, according to the authors, a decision-making concern in choosing system design alternatives is that such decisions are robust to a wide range of uncertain operating conditions, establishing a balance between achieving current goals and flexibility in the future.

Studies on the need for information consider that it is not easy to evaluate information, as it is often very involved and affected by different types of uncertainties. What needs to be understood is that strategic decision-making is a combination of creating meaning within a given context, the implicit and explicit selection of process tools, and the use of tools to reach a decision. Studies show that current knowledge claims that groups make better decisions than individuals because of their ability to accumulate more information on greater diversity and build a more comprehensive picture of the situation based on a more excellent range of contexts than falls within an individual's experience.

The information comes from interactions with the environment and the search for information. Managers are advised to make strategic decisions based on changes in their external business environments. Considering a smaller variety of options makes the process faster in responding to challenges in the external environment. On the other hand, this runs the risk of restricting social functions by limiting creativity within the organization.

The concern with information is relevant to this research since it examines the decision-making process in associations. Knowing the process, primarily how it is conducted, and understanding how information is disseminated and applied at the time of the decision leads to a macro understanding that decision methods and methodologies can be constructed to meet the specificities of the group.

A third issue found in the literature concerns the strategic character of the decision-making, evidenced by the studies by Ferreira, Coelho, and Moutinho (2020), Ghosh et al. (2020), Mishra and Venkataraman (2020), and Godwin (2015). Studies on the strategic character of the decision-making process affirm the importance of strategic decisions as a competitive differential and as a motivating force in the decision-making process; thus, strategic decisions serve as guidelines for individuals who participate in decision-making groups.

Strategic integration and managerial decision-making

Strategic integration and development are significant indications of the circumstances of each business. In other words, organizations, regardless of their background or characteristics, depend considerably on development techniques and tools that assist them in pursuing their goals. In the view of Rachid, Mohamed, and Khouaja (2018), the concept of strategy refers to what we want to do and how we intend to do it and defines it as a declaration of intent concerning long-term goals. In this case, the authors state that the strategy is more concerned with achieving these objectives; therefore, the strategy must have strategic objectives and an action plan.

A conceptual path can be built from strategic alliances. Strategic alliances allow for environmental improvements based on an integrative perspective and can be the safest path. There are several reasons why companies are required to form strategic partnerships to deal with environmental issues, and these alliances are usually guided by competence or legitimacy. Milosevic (2016) considers that competence is related to a company's skills and what it knows how to do in a more specific approach. Its legitimacy comes from understanding the market, its investment capacity, and its commercial and social relations.

Among the motivations for strategic alliances, gaining a competitive advantage stands out. An organization's ability to sustain a competitive advantage is linked to the successful pursuit of a business strategy that generates mutual benefits for partner companies, where companies remain profitable and work for the common good. In this case, knowledge of D.M.s' attributes sees to it that mutually beneficial results are achieved.

Associations can be seen as strategic alliances. Therefore, understanding the role of a T.A. as representing the expectations of its members guided this research. Once this role is understood, it is possible to develop decision-making tools that meet the needs of the associative environment.

Finally, the fourth issue addressed in the literature is the role of associations concerning collaboration strategies. The purpose of associations has been investigated by Husted, Allen, Rivera (2010), Barnett (2013), and van den Oever and Martin (2018). Studies related to associations demonstrate the importance of associations and their representative roles. When companies join an association and participate in it, they do so because they seek competitive advantages, improve management through shared courses and learning, and join forces with other members in campaigns that promote their products and services.

The collaboration strategy through associations leads to member companies considering different forms of social responsibility and partnership, thereby defining the importance of obtaining benefits through collaborative partnerships. T.A.s operate under the premise of promoting the shared interests of their members.

Studies related to the issue of strategic partnership advocate creating value for associated companies through strategic partnerships. Still, one must consider the different paths that potential partner organizations adopt as a decision-making process. A concern in the formation of associations is linked to its members' strengths because there is a risk that large companies exercise control over a T.A. by using it to promote their interests rather than the shared interests of the entire industry.

The representative function of a T.A. guides the present study based on SCA foundations. Thus, this paper explores a strategic path that associations can follow to fulfill their purposes and find additional decision-making tools. It is important to note that, in our methodology, SCA foundations consider all issues to do with behavior and influences in working groups, the need for information in the decision-making process, the strategic character of decision-making, and the role of associations.

The SCA is a participatory approach for planning complex strategic decision-making, considering uncertainty, shortage of time, limited resources, and conflicting interest demands (Friend and Hickling, 2006). The SCA methodology consists of four complementary modes of decision-making: shaping, designing, comparing, and choosing. These modes are detailed in the next section.

III. THE GROUP DECISION MODEL PROPOSED

The SCA leads to an understanding of the T.A.'s decision-making process, focusing on strategic actions. The proposed model aligns the brainstorming technique with the SCA statements to improve the process for generating ideas. Figure 1 shows a flowchart representing the proposed model.

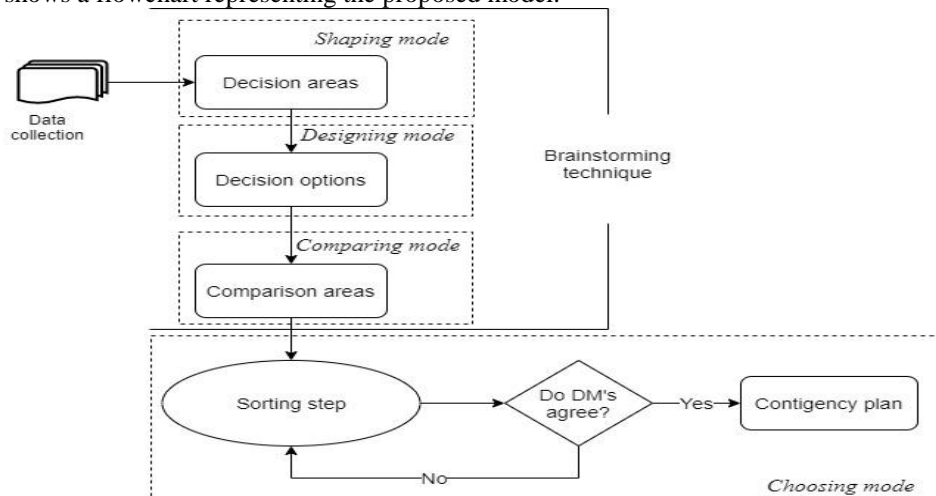


Figure 1. Phases of the group decision model proposed
Source: The authors (2020)

Information was gathered in two ways. The first was by observation. For example, when applying the board of Directors' approach, the researchers took notes on the board's behavior and the process adopted for decision-making. The second was by using the Strategic Choice Approach (SCA), which identified the role developed by the T.A.

At an initial meeting, the facilitator presented the purpose and reasons for analyzing the Association's decision-making process. The focus of this first meeting was to raise awareness of the importance of this analysis and seek the board's agreement to conduct the project. Every change process requires specific care to be taken over-explaining what the changes aim to achieve. How this approach is made can directly impact whether or not proposals for changes are accepted. The proposed model focuses on reliability, the need to adapt to environmental changes, how to facilitate actions, how to make the decision-making process more agile, and how to make the D.M. feel more secure.

Having received the Board of Directors' commitment to the decision-making process, the facilitator's role changed to evaluating each project stage. This included attending and making presentations at the meetings scheduled for project development. The sessions were planned and discussed previously with the executive director of the T.A.

The first stage of the approach is modeling. At the modeling stage, the goal is to identify decision areas, which represent the points that will be considered the critical issues of the decision problem. In the Design stage, decision options (such as alternatives for the decision problem) and their respective role were established, thus, enabling a decision tree to be built that represented all possible paths for the organizational decision-making process.

A second workshop was scheduled with the board of directors to confirm the decision paths established in the decision tree to develop the comparison stage. These data were presented to the board members, and, once approved, the comparison rules that led to the result and the strategic choice within this process were defined.

That done, a new workshop was scheduled with the members of the T.A.'s Board of Directors, inviting them to participate in the fourth phase of the SCA. This phase represents the moment that the D.M.s analyze the decision options and determine the results. Thus, the facilitator's impressions were evaluated by the members of the board concerning the results obtained. At that time, each member was invited to express their opinions and perceptions, which led to acceptance and confirmation of the results.

IV. THE CASE STUDY: TRADE ASSOCIATION OF NOVA LONDRINA, PR, BRAZIL

To further investigate how a T.A. evolves, a case study was undertaken in preparation for a direct approach to the people involved in the actions and to the representatives of a T.A. As a result, the application of SCA was developed at the T.A. of Nova Londrina, PR, Brazil. The DMs for this application were the associates of its Board of Directors. This TA was founded on 03/11/1971 as an association for non-economic purposes for an indeterminate period without limiting participant members. Creating the T.A. of Nova Londrina PR aims to bring together and guide the commercial and industrial sectors of the Municipalities of the Region.

4.1 Description and application of the proposed model

The analysis of the T.A.'s group decision process sought answers to the proposed objective. The DMs who participated in the process were the associates of the Board of Directors of the T.A. All activities were undertaken in an environment familiar to the workshop participants and were directed by the facilitator, who, in this case, is the author of this manuscript. In addition to ascertaining the results of each stage, the facilitator paid attention to the individuals' behavior, assessed the individuals' familiarity with the scenarios and how comfortable they were with the process. The steps in analyzing the approach are described in this section, and the facilitators' perceptions inform the final analysis.

4.1.1 Shaping Mode

Seven representatives of the T.A. attended this workshop, but one had to leave early and did not forward his assessment. In this stage, the decision areas inherent to the T.A.'s operations were defined.

As a working system, the researchers suggested ideas, and the board members complemented these and defined the path and decision areas to be considered. After some ideas were discussed, it was agreed among the board members that the decision areas to be considered would be those presented in table 1. The decision areas were framed and labeled concerning the coverage area to facilitate and simplify visualization within a strategic view. This framework is shown in the table, in the Label column.

Table 1 Decision area

Decision area	Label
What kinds of decisions does the trade association make?	Paper
Which groups does the decision affect?	Scope
What information is needed?	Information

4.1.2 Design Mode

At this stage, decision options for each decision area need to be identified. In the same way, as in the previous step, the board members were asked to discuss options. So, from the group's perception and knowledge, the decision options to be applied in the approach in question could be proposed. After some time spent analyzing and discussing possibilities, the decision options presented in Table 2 were considered.

Table 2 Decision options

Decision Area	Decision options	Label
What kinds of decisions does the trade association make?	Strategic (long term)	Function
	Tactics (medium-term)	
	Operational (short term)	
Which groups does the decision affect?	General Community	Scope
	Trade Officials	
	Entrepreneur	
	Associate	
What information is needed?	Financial return to the trade association	Information
	Impact on sales	
	Costs generated in the action	
	Impacts on the environment	

After defining the decision options and these, the board members participating in the meeting considered sufficient for analysis, then following the proposed SCA, a decision tree was constructed. The decision tree presents all decision alternatives obtained by comparing and combining decision areas and options, as shown in Figure 2 (i.e., all combinations for the possible solution of the decision problem).

Function	Scope	Information	Identifier
Strategic	General community	Financial return to Trade Asociation	A
		Impact on sales	B
		Costs generated in the action	C
		Impacts on the environment	D
	Trade Officials	Financial return to Trade Asociation	E
		Impact on sales	F
		Costs generated in the action	G
		Impacts on the environment	H
	Entrepreneur	Financial return to Trade Asociation	I
		Impact on sales	J
		Costs generated in the action	K
		Impacts on the environment	L
Associate	Financial return to Trade Asociation	M	
	Impact on sales	N	
	Costs generated in the action	O	
	Impacts on the environment	P	
Tactics	General community	Financial return to Trade Asociation	Q
		Impact on sales	R
		Costs generated in the action	S
		Impacts on the environment	T
	Trade Officials	Financial return to Trade Asociation	U
		Impact on sales	V
		Costs generated in the action	X
		Impacts on the environment	W
	Entrepreneur	Financial return to Trade Asociation	Y
		Impact on sales	Z
		Costs generated in the action	AA
		Impacts on the environment	BB
Associate	Financial return to Trade Asociation	CC	
	Impact on sales	DD	
	Costs generated in the action	EE	
	Impacts on the environment	FF	
Operational	General community	Financial return to Trade Asociation	GG
		Impact on sales	HH
		Costs generated in the action	II
		Impacts on the environment	JJ
	Trade Officials	Financial return to Trade Asociation	KK
		Impact on sales	LL
		Costs generated in the action	MM
		Impacts on the environment	NN
	Entrepreneur	Financial return to Trade Asociation	OO
		Impact on sales	PP
		Costs generated in the action	QQ
		Impacts on the environment	RR
Associate	Financial return to Trade Asociation	SS	
	Impact on sales	TT	
	Costs generated in the action	UU	
	Impacts on the environment	VV	

Figure 2 – Decision tree

4.1.3 Comparison Mode

As a next step, it was necessary to establish the comparison rules and the decision maker's preferences. The working system adopted was a workshop with the board members of the T.A. In the selection stage, six members were present who undertook to evaluate the criteria of each comparison area. Those present were asked to assess the decision areas following their view of the T.A.'s decision process. Each area was evaluated individually on a Likert scale ranging from 1, the least important, to 5, the most important practice. A simple average was then obtained, resulting in the evaluation scale applied in the choice process.

After many arguments and much analysis, four areas of comparison were established, presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison area

Order of importance	Comparison area	Label	Comparison rule
1	Scope	Scope	The higher the value, the better
2	Information's need	Information	The higher the value, the better
3	Complexity	Complexity	The higher the value, the worse
4	Bureaucracy	Bureaucracy	The higher the value, the worse

Be noteworthy that scope represents the scope of the decision option. Information need represents the amount of data required in the decision process. Complexity means the difficulty involved in carrying out the decision option, especially when considering its interdependent relationships. Finally, bureaucracy corresponds to the degree to which procedures are inflexible, time-consuming, and subject to top-down commands that are rarely open to negotiation when implementing the decision option.

4.1.4 Choosing Mode

A new meeting was scheduled with the T.A.'s Board members, inviting them to participate in the decision analysis process. On the day that the process was applied, six council members undertook an evaluation of the criteria for each area of comparison. This evaluation was conducted using the Likert scale, as described above. Then, statistically, the mode was obtained for calculation purposes, resulting in an assessment scale applied in the decision process, shown in Table 4.

Mode is the measure of central tendency that identifies the value that occurs most frequently in the sample distribution. (HAIR JR., BABIN, MONEY and SAMOUEL, 2005).

Table 4 Score for decision areas

Decision options	Scope	Need for information	Complexity	Bureaucracy
Strategic	1	5	5	1
Tactic	3	4	4	4
Operational	3	3	2	2
General Community	3	3	3	3
Traders	3	4	4	2
Industrialists	1	5	3	4
Associates	5	4	3	3
Financial return to Trade Association	3	4	4	4
Impact on sales for members	5	5	5	4
Costs generated in the action	4	4	4	4
Impacts on the environment	1	5	5	5

The subsequent analysis set out to score each of the decision options. After discussion with the Board members, the scores were obtained, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Scoring alternatives for decision

Identifier	Scope	Information's need	Complexity	Bureaucracy
A	7	12	12	8
B	9	13	13	8
C	8	12	12	8
D	5	13	13	9
E	7	13	13	7
F	9	14	14	7
G	8	13	13	7
H	5	14	14	8
I	5	14	12	9
J	7	15	13	9
K	6	14	12	9
L	3	15	13	10
M	9	13	12	8
N	11	14	13	8
O	10	13	12	8
P	7	14	13	9
Q	9	11	11	11
R	11	12	12	11
S	10	11	11	11
T	7	12	12	12
U	9	12	12	10
V	11	13	13	10
X	10	12	12	10
W	7	13	13	11
Y	7	13	11	12
Z	9	14	12	12
AA	8	13	11	12
BB	5	14	12	13
CC	11	12	11	11
DD	13	13	12	11
EE	12	12	11	11
FF	9	13	12	12
GG	9	10	9	9
HH	11	11	10	9
II	10	10	9	9
JJ	7	11	10	10
KK	9	11	10	8
LL	11	12	11	8
MM	10	11	10	8
NN	7	12	11	9

OO	7	12	9	10
PP	9	13	10	10
QQ	8	12	9	10
RR	5	13	10	11
SS	11	11	9	9
TT	13	12	10	9
UU	12	11	9	9
VV	9	12	10	10

Since many paths were presented, it was necessary to define the limits of each score to evaluate the alternatives. The definition given in Table 6 resulted from an evaluation made by the T.A.'s Board of Directors and the researchers, based on the data presented in Table 5. As a result, evaluation limits were established.

Table 6 Score limits for the evaluation of alternatives

Labels	Choice
Scope	>12
Need for information	>12
Complexity	<10
Bureaucracy	<10

The next step sought to frame each path within limits applied and presented in table 6. This application, developed by the researchers, was operational and manual. The data presented in table 5 were compared with the limits of table 6 to find the path that best reflects the T.A.'s decision at that time. The data, which were verified, are shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Final Alternatives

Identifier	Scope	Need for information	Complexity	Bureaucracy
TT	13	12	10	9

Applying the filters (limits), the path representing the Trade Association's evaluation process was found: T.T., as shown in Table 7. In the view presented, the T.T. path represents an operational function concerned with reflecting sales to members.

V. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

After applying the decision model and classifying the role of trade associations, the authors identified three issues to which attention must be drawn. This section discusses them.

The first issue concerns what the Association does (i.e., their overall representativeness). It was evident at this point in the analysis that the Association's role did not include identifying and studying areas such as long-term planning and vision because the answers pointed to more operational activities. This does not mean that the Association altogether ignored its long-term goals. Instead, it reflects that the Association's role is more focused on the day-to-day operations and developing specific campaigns that meet members' short-term organizational needs.

The study showed that the Association's interests were focused on associated entrepreneurs. In a more detailed analysis of the results, the Association's role was found: the T.A. represents and helps the daily business of member organizations. The study also focused on increasing sales; the T.A.'s primary objective is to increase its associates' sales. Understanding that the Association's primary goal is increasing its members' sales highlights its non-profit character.

On the other hand, the study does not adequately address the concern about costs generated in the actions proposed by the Association and minimizes the worries about the environmental effects of the Association's efforts.

The second issue considered is the need for information within the decision-making process. At no time did the group interrupt its decision-making process to seek further information. Instead, the group made decisions based on its past experiences and information received in the workshop. In other words, data was collected for the decision, even if only informally and momentarily. However, this does not imply that this information can be characterized as

having a higher value since this study could not measure its value. The researchers thus call for further studies to investigate if and how the information presented for decision-making is evaluated.

It is possible to analyze the group decision process in the literature and verify to what extent it is linked to the results obtained in the SCA analysis. Within the monitoring process, the T.A.'s current decision-making process was formal when holding meetings but informal when presenting the problem to be decided. Another point worth mentioning is decision-making, based on open voting, determined by a simple majority. This demonstrates that the process was not systematized and that D.M.s were susceptible to influences of the moment, especially from members who had the power to argue or impose their ideas.

The third issue dealt with in this study was the strategic character of the decision. The results presented identified that the Association's decision-making role is operational, focused on its members, and increased sales. However, it is noteworthy that this statement does not exclude the strategic character within the Association's actions and decisions.

In summary, from the approach presented for this study, it has been confirmed that there are influences on the decision-making process and that it is not systematized. The study showed a gap in the process of seeking information for decision-making by the decision-making group. Besides, the T.A.'s actions were more operational than strategic, which was expected as this has been mentioned in earlier theoretical studies.

5.1 Limitations of the study and opportunities for future research

One limitation of this research was the breadth of the application process. In this case, how the D.M.s prepared for the decisions and sought essential information to make decisions effectively were not studied. The associates' satisfaction has also not been researched as much as the actions and decisions taken by the Association. The lack of a more formal and systematic process for decision-making also limited the research because the analyses were based on the researcher's perceptions, which may have been influenced during the research process. The researchers recommend future research on T.A.s' members' profiles to find an ideal profile for the Board members. It is expected that this will lead to a more assertive decision-making process and encourage more active leadership from representative members who can effectively contribute to the development of the Association as a whole.

A concern that emerges from the results of this research is this T.A.'s role, especially concerning its focusing more on operational actions, whereas the role of T.A.s is understood to be of a more strategic nature (Godwin, 2015). More research is needed to identify how well this operational role meets members' expectations and to review the current vision of the Association's actions. Additionally, the importance of and need for information in decision-making must be explored further. A study focused on understanding the extent of the information required in T.A.s' group decision processes can help prepare its members to participate in the process more effectively.

Finally, the approach applied did not link the results to the development of a decision-making model. Future research should look to formulate a decision-making model for T.A.s. A well-defined model that leads D.M.s to reflect on the consequences of their decisions will undoubtedly contribute to the Association in asserting its role, thereby leading it to meet its members' expectations to an even greater extent. A multicriteria model of decision-making would be beneficial. More information about multicriteria models is available in studies by Zopounidis, Doumpos (2002), Baucells, Sarin (2003), Doumpos, Zopounidis (2010), Ulucan, Atici (2013), Chen, Xu, Xia (2015), Gelvez, Melon (2016), Kitayama, Yamazaki, Takano, Aiba (2018), Güçdemir, Selim (2018), Schotten, Morais (2019), Çalı, Balaman (2019), and Doumpos, Figueira (2019).

5.2 Contributions

This paper contributes to the understanding of the role of associations as representatives of their members. It has demonstrated that although the literature has characterized decisions as strategic and the vision has been of the long-term, T.A.s can be described as having an operational role which leads to reflecting on expectations and reality. Do the associates expect the Association to be more operational than strategic? This answer is essential for understanding the role of associations and the participation of their members.

Another significant contribution is the results of the approach. First, the SCA indicated the path that associations should take in the decision-making process. By showing more operational actions, focusing on their members' interests, and with the specific objective of increasing sales, the SCA addressed the need to streamline this process using a systematic method that considered the environment, information, and consequences of the decisions taken by the T.A. This path includes developing a decision-making model based on the multicriteria methodology, which can contribute so that the D.M. has more flexibility and feels more secure during the process.

Finally, this research has outlined paths for future studies, such as analyzing T.A.s' expectations of their roles by asking their members to evaluate this. There is also a need for research on the breadth and lack of additional information for the decision-making process within T.A.s and on the market. As a result, the Board of Directors can better assess the members' expectations of the decision-making process.

VI. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Decision-making is a process that seeks to lead D.M.s to search for better organizational results when systematized. The concern is with organizations' long-term survival, which cannot be dissociated from strategic

objectives. Within Associations, this study gains a more central character in the expectations of what a larger group can achieve beyond merely operational results in organizations that generally consider increasing profits as their primary goals.

It is necessary and evident in the development of this research to offer working conditions and look for models that can help improve this role by finding a model that allows agility, reliability, and security.

The organizational decision-making process is quite complicated. Therefore, the use and application of methods or tools that help search for the best result should be a constant goal of researchers and scholars. This article sought to examine decision-making in a T.A., an environment that presents particularities regarding the nature of the business and members' best interests. In this case, it is evident that the T.A.'s decision-making goes beyond individual preoccupations to a concern for collective interests and often extends its scope to other situations directly interconnected, such as the community in general.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Availability of data and materials

The data used for analysis and the findings of this research are presented in the article's tables. Unfortunately, complementary data cannot be made available due to legal and confidentiality issues guided by the research organization.

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