CHAPTER 3
Structuring Decisions

Notes

Chapters 3 and 4 might be considered the heart of *Making Hard Decisions with DecisionTools*. Here is where most of the action happens. Chapter 3 describes the process of structuring objectives and building influence diagrams and decision trees. Chapter 4 discusses analysis. The chapter begins with a comprehensive discussion of value structuring and incorporates value-focused thinking throughout. Constructing influence diagrams and decision trees to reflect multiple objectives is demonstrated, and the chapter contains a discussion of scales for measuring achievement of fundamental objectives, including how to construct scales for objectives with no natural measures.

Understanding one's objectives in a decision context is a crucial step in modeling the decision. This section of the chapter shows how to identify and structure values, with an important emphasis on distinguishing between fundamental and means objectives and creating hierarchies and networks, respectively, to represent these. The fundamental objectives are the main reasons for caring about a decision in the first place, and so they play a large role in subsequent modeling with influence diagrams or decision trees.

Students can generally grasp the concepts of influence diagrams and how to interpret them. Creating influence diagrams, on the other hand, seems to be much more difficult. Thus, in teaching students how to create an influence diagram for a specific situation, we stress basic influence diagrams, in particular the basic risky decision and imperfect information. Students should be able to identify these basic forms and modify them to match specific problems. The problems at the end of the chapter range from simple identification of basic forms to construction of diagrams that are fairly complex.

The discussion of decision trees is straightforward, and many students have already been exposed to decision trees somewhere in their academic careers. Again, a useful strategy seems to be to stress some of the basic forms.

Also discussed in Chapter 3 is the matter of including in the decision model appropriate details. One issue is the inclusion of probabilities and payoffs. More crucial is the clarity test and the development of scales for measuring fundamental objectives. The matter of clarifying definitions of alternatives, outcomes, and consequences is absolutely crucial in real-world problems. The clarity test forces us to define all aspects of a problem with great care. The advantage in the classroom of religiously applying the clarity test is that the problems one addresses obtain much more realism and relevance for the students. It is very easy to be lazy and gloss over definitional issues in working through a problem (e.g., "Let's assume that the market could go either up or down"). If care is taken to define events to pass the clarity test ("The market goes up means that the Standard & Poor's 500 Index rises"), problems become more realistic and engaging.

The last section in Chapter 3 describes in detail how to use PrecisionTree for structuring decisions. The instructions are intended to be a self-contained tutorial on constructing decision trees and influence diagrams. PrecisionTree does have an interactive video tutorial along with video tutorials on the basics and videos from experts. These videos along with example spreadsheets and the manual all can be found in the PrecisionTree menu ribbon under Help, then choosing Welcome to PrecisionTree.

Please note that if you enter probability values that do not sum to 100% for a chance node, then the program uses normalized probability values. For example, if a chance node has two branches and the corresponding probabilities entered are (10%, 80%), then the model will use (11.11%, 88.89%) – i.e., 0.1/(0.1+0.8) and 0.8/(0.1+0.8).

Because this chapter focuses on structuring the decision, many of the problems do not have all of the numbers required to complete the model. In some cases, the spreadsheet solution provides the structure of the problem only, and the formulas were deleted (for example, problem 3.10). In other cases, the model is

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