

12 Angry Men Analysed Through Organisational Behavioural Theory

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to analyze the events that occurred in the film, 12 Angry Men, to execute three tasks. The first is to analyze whether the jury made a good decision. The second but related task in that analysis is to evaluate the factors that helped in the process of decision-making (and the ones that impeded it). The factors discussed here include the role of emotions, stereotypes and cognitive biases to name a few. The third and final task is to evaluate the ways in which the film illustrated the significance of sense making in the decision-making process. The overall argument presented here is that a good decision was made because ethical decision-making was employed. Moreover, the strategies some of the jurors (mostly number 8) used in sense making (such as communication, action and retrospection) helped to overcome a number of sweeping generalizations that might have biased the jury to render a guilty verdict.

A Good Decision Was Made

Positive Factors Helping the Decision

In the end of the movie, the jury reaches a not guilty verdict, and this is a good decision because there was enough reasonable doubt created. Reasonable doubt was created mostly by Juror number 8, who relied not purely on the 'facts' presented (like Juror #5) but his emotions, too. He was the first to have sympathy for the boy (the accused) by, as he says it, "putting myself in the kids place" (12 Angry Men). He felt that the accused, only 18 years old, had experienced great injustice in his life, having been abused by his father, and that moreover he considered the accused might have not been well represented by his lawyer because he was a poor boy from the slums, and thus the lawyer had no real incentive to do a thorough job. As Robbins and Judge (2014) argue, good decision makers use their emotions and feelings since it helps to engage in ethical decision making. Indeed, juror number 8 decision to rely on emotions and empathy even helped to encourage other jurors, like juror number 10 to consider issues beyond what has been presented in court ("on the surface, the boy looks guilty, but if we dig a little bit deeper" (12 Angry Men), he argues). So having a "bunch of bleeding hearts" is important in a group setting because there needs to be sympathy and empathy when decisions are made, especially a decision as important as when a life is at stake.

Group Dynamics & Development: Both Helpful and Harmful

Group dynamics and development were also at work, and sometimes these were helpful and harmful in the decision making process. The stages of group development was the model originally created by Tuckman (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). When the jurors initially get together, there is a lot of confusion about what they are going to do and how they are going to go about doing it, though eventually juror number 1 assumes the leadership role, deciding who will sit where and how the discussion will proceed (with each juror taking a turn). However,

conflict occurs, many speak out of turn, many yell at one another, showing evidence of the 'storming' phase (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). 'Norming', or group cohesion, is overtly apparent when almost all of the jurors turn their back on juror number 7 as he spews a bunch of vile stereotypes about the poor. Performing, which occurs when there is a structure and they are trying to get on with the objective (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013), is also evident when the members are willing and able to speak about their positions on why they believe the accused is guilty or not guilty. The ability to openly speak was not evident at the start (some did not even want to talk about the verdict at any length or even at all, i.e. number 10 says it is not worth discussing because he got a 'fair trial'). Group dynamics could also be seen in conflict resolution (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013), where the jurors decided to do this sometimes through secret ballots. So there were aspects of the group development and dynamics that sometimes helped and harmed the decision, but in the end it worked out.

Negative Factors

Number 1: Stereotypes

Another reason why the not guilty verdict was a good decision is because there were a lot of stereotypes or false generalisations held about the accused that made every juror, apart from juror number 8, which is negative because it made them biased towards a guilty verdict. Stereotypes occur when someone, as Robbins and Judge (2014) argue, judges a person according to the perceptions they have of a group to which someone belongs. The perceptions held about the accused 'group' are immediately apparent. One of juror says that kids like accused are "born liars" (12 Angry Men); another says later that children born in slums are a potential "menace to society"(12 Angry Men) and then near the end of the movie juror number 7 explodes into lengthy diatribe of gross stereotypes, arguing 'they' (poor people from the slums) do not care about human life as much as other people , he further proclaims "they don't have feeling " "they can do anything " and "there is not one of them who is any good" (12 Angry Men). The problem with these stereotypes is that they often do not contain "a shred of truth when applied to a particular person or situation" (Robbins & Judge, 2014, p. 82). Indeed, juror number 5, who came from the slums, resembles nothing of what they claim poor people to be like, and so not surprisingly he takes these generalisations very personally: " I used to play in a back yard that was filled with garbage. Maybe it still smells on me," (12 Angry Men) he scowls. What is worse perhaps than these wrong generalisations, the jurors do not seem to be really aware of how the stereotypes they believe work to unfairly and inaccurately bias their decision towards a guilty verdict when they are working very powerfully: " I think the guy's guilty. You couldn't change my mind if you talked for a hundred years" (12 Angry Men), says juror number 7 (the one who exploded into the nasty diatribe). Eventually, however, his mind is changed, and that is because of the way emotions and sense making, to be discussed later, were used.

Number 2: Bias & Cognitive Errors

Not only were stereotypes at work, it does seem there was some kind of intuition or attribution error (Robbins & Judge, 2014) occurring in the thinking of juror number 3. Early on in the movie the viewer learns the juror has had a fall out with his son (after juror number 3 was hit by his 15 year old son, his son left and juror number 3 says he had not seen his boy in 3 years). "Rotten kid! You work your heart out" (12 Angry Men), he declares. It is at the end of the movie when juror number 3 takes out a picture and rips it up when the viewer realises juror number 3 was making his 'guilty' decision based on "affectively charged" (Robbins & Judge, 2014, p. 87) emotions stemming from the anger he has towards his son, which was (wrongly) being projected on the accused, making him lean heavily towards the guilty verdict.

The not guilty verdict is also a good decision because, through the process of communication, the jurors were able to overcome what is called anchoring bias. This refers to the tendency to "fixate on initial information and fail to adequately adjust for subsequent information" (Robbins & Judge, 2014, p. 88). Juror number 5 and number 3 remained unconvinced at the end of the movie in the spite of all the reasonable doubt created (doubt was created about the uniqueness of the knife, the way the knife was plunged into the body, to name a few points) because among other things of the witness who claimed she saw the accused kill his father. Juror number 5 and 3 believed this to be "unshakable testimony" (12 Angry Men). They believed this to be 'unshakable' because it was the most 'highly visible' (Robbins & Judge, 2014) and therefore the most believable, and that was 'good enough' evidence for juror number 3 and 5 to give a guilty verdict. Their choice here is therefore representative of a "satisfying choice", or the "first acceptable one" encountered rather than the "optimal one" (Robbins & Judge, 2014).

Thus, the decision of the not guilty verdict at the end of the movie is also good because in the process of making this decision, bounded rationality (March, 1978), or the limited information processing capability, became apparent. As Juror number 8 declares, even with all of the 'facts' presented throughout the trial, the jurors there 'cannot really know anything': "we are gambling on probabilities"(12 Angry Men), he says. Some of the probabilities discussed included the time it took for the old man to get to the door to 'see' the accused, as the old man claimed, running down the hall; there is also the probability that the female witness, who claimed to have seen the accused stab his father, did not since she possibly had imprints on her nose left from wearing glasses, which obviously would cast doubt on the credibility of her testimony.

Sense Making in the Decision Process

Sense making also played a role in the not guilty verdict the jury rendered. Sense making might be conceived as a site where "meanings materialize" (Weick, et al, 2005, p. 408). In part, sense making occurs through language and communication. An example of sense making can be seen when a juror number 8 was trying to figure out how it would be possible for the woman to see the killing when a train was passing by. They start the discussion, like Weick et al (2005) argues, in chaos, not really knowing how it could be possible for a woman to see a killing through a moving train. But they try to understand by talking it out with the other members of

the jury (i.e. language), trying to figure out how long it might take for a train to pass a window. Through feedback and discussion, they agree that it might only take a couple of seconds (approximately 10), making it impossible for the man upstairs to hear as he said he heard the accused yell, "I'm going to kill you!" (12 Angry Men). Thus, here is an example of how "a situation is talked into existence" (Weick, et al, 2005, p. 413).

Presumption, another aspect of sense making (Weick, et al, 2005), is also evident when juror number nine presumes that the old man did not lie about hearing the scream. Rather, the old man, juror number nine thinks, just wanted to be "questioned, and listen to, and quoted just once", a presumption he makes because he presumes also that the old man is an "a quiet, frightened, insignificant man who has been nothing all his life, who has never had recognition—his name in the newspapers. Nobody knows him after seventy-five years." (12 Angry Men) So juror number 9 is using presumption to make sense of why the old man would say he heard something he never did.

The jurors also rely on 'action' in sense making, another process discussed by Weick (2005). An example can be seen when juror number 8 tries to replicate the room (based on the diagram of the apartment they receive from the courtroom) and walks slowly as he thought the old man did to time to see how long it would take to get from the bedroom to the front door. Another instance of action and sense making can be reflected where juror number three and juror number eight attempts to replicate the killing with the switchblade as they are trying to discern the angle of the knife. So action is evident, too.

Another aspect of sense making that Weick et al (2005) discusses which is evident in the film is retrospection. Retrospection means to look back on events. This occurs when juror number nine notices juror number five rubbing his nose because of the indents that the glasses leave, and just then he recalls the female witness who claimed to have seen the killing was doing the same thing. Based on this, he presumes a number of things; first, that she wears glasses, second, that she would not wear them for bed and third, if she did see anything she would have seen them without her glasses on, making the testimony doubtful. So here again is another aspect of sense making that helps the jurors make the not guilty decision.

Conclusion

Overall, the execution of this work shows how a number of the concepts that were learned throughout the course thus far apply in the movie. Throughout the analysis and evaluation, it is very clear that the factors helping the process of decision-making were the ability of some of the jurors of the size with the accused love the factors that impede the decision process where the stereotypes, generalizations as well as the conflict that occurred in the group. Evidence of sense making through action, communication and among others presumption were accounted for.

References

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