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Managerial Decision-Making: Perspectives of Rationality, Intuition, and Herbert Simon's Bounded Rationality Model

Hariyanto[1]*, Oman Sukmana[2], Gonda Yumitro[2], Nurudin[4]
[1]Doctoral Program in Sociology, Graduate School Directorate
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia
[2,3,4] Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia
*Correspondence: hariyanto@webmail.umm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Managerial decision-making stands at the intersection of rationality, intuition, and cognitive limitation—a tension that Herbert Simon's bounded rationality model illuminates with enduring relevance. This systematic review and empirical study examine how Indonesian organizational managers navigate complex decisions in conditions of uncertainty, time pressure, and informational constraints. Drawing on a systematic review of 87 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024, complemented by a cross-sectional survey of 245 senior managers from public and private organizations in Java, Indonesia, this study assesses the prevalence, predictors, and outcomes of rational, intuitive, and bounded rationality decision-making approaches. Survey findings reveal that pure rational decision-making is rarely employed in practice (18.4%), while intuition-dominant approaches are used by 31.8% of managers and bounded rationality satisficing strategies by 49.8%. Managerial experience, organizational culture, decision complexity, and time pressure significantly predict decision style preferences. Structural equation modeling demonstrates that decision quality—measured by self-reported decision outcomes—is highest when intuition and analytical reasoning are integrated within a bounded rationality framework. The study extends Simon's model to the Indonesian sociocultural context, identifying the role of social harmony norms (kerukunan), hierarchical organizational cultures, and relational trust in shaping decision-making processes.

Keywords: managerial decision-making; bounded rationality; Herbert Simon; intuition; organizational behavior; sociology of organizations; Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of how organizational managers make decisions has occupied scholars across economics, psychology, sociology, and management science for over a century. The classical economic model of homo economicus—the perfectly rational decision-maker who maximizes utility through comprehensive information processing and optimal choice selection—has long served as the theoretical benchmark against which actual managerial behavior is measured and found wanting. Herbert Simon's revolutionary challenge to this model, introduced through his concept of bounded rationality in Administrative Behavior (1947) and elaborated in subsequent work, remains one of the

most significant theoretical contributions to organizational science of the twentieth century (Simon, 1947; 1955; 1979).

Simon demonstrated that human decision-makers are limited by three fundamental constraints that preclude the achievement of full rationality: limited cognitive capacity for processing information; incomplete and uncertain information about decision alternatives and their consequences; and insufficient time for exhaustive evaluation of all possible options. Within these constraints, real-world decision-makers do not optimize but satisfice—selecting the first alternative that meets a minimum threshold of acceptability rather than searching for the theoretically optimal solution (Simon, 1955).

Subsequent decades of research have elaborated, tested, and extended Simon's framework in multiple directions. Kahneman and Tversky's program of behavioral economics demonstrated systematic cognitive biases and heuristics that further constrain rational decision-making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kahneman, 2011). Research on naturalistic decision-making revealed that expert decision-makers in high-stakes, time-pressured environments frequently employ pattern-recognition and intuitive processes rather than deliberate analytical reasoning (Klein, 1998; 2008). Organizational sociologists have highlighted the ways in which institutional norms, political processes, and cultural frames shape decision-making within and across organizations (March, 1994; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Despite the richness of this theoretical tradition, empirical research on managerial decision-making in Indonesian organizational contexts remains sparse. Indonesia's rapidly developing economy, characterized by a distinctive mix of state-owned enterprises, private conglomerates, and small-medium enterprises operating within complex cultural frameworks of hierarchy, collectivism, and relational trust, offers a theoretically productive context for examining how cultural and institutional factors shape the bounded rationality model (Hofstede et al., 2010; Trompenaars, 1993). Understanding managerial decision-making in this context has direct practical implications for organizational performance and governance quality in one of Southeast Asia's largest economies.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) What decision-making styles (rational, intuitive, bounded rationality) predominate among Indonesian organizational managers, and what factors predict style preferences? (2) How do managerial experience, organizational culture, and contextual factors moderate the relationship between decision style and decision quality? (3) How does the Indonesian sociocultural context—particularly norms of social harmony and hierarchical organizational culture—shape the expression of bounded rationality in practice?

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 245)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	162 (66.1%)

	Female	83 (33.9%)
Age Group	31–40 years	78 (31.8%)
	41–50 years	112 (45.7%)
	51+ years	55 (22.4%)
Managerial Level	Top Management (Director/CEO)	52 (21.2%)
	Middle Management	98 (40.0%)
	Lower Management	95 (38.8%)
Sector	Public/Government	103 (42.0%)
	Private (Large Enterprise)	88 (35.9%)
	Private (SME)	54 (22.0%)
Years of Managerial Experience	< 5 years	41 (16.7%)
	5–14 years	112 (45.7%)
	15+ years	92 (37.6%)

Source: Survey data, 2024. SME = Small and Medium Enterprise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Classical Rational Model and Its Critiques

The classical rational model of decision-making, rooted in neoclassical economics and early operations research, posits that decision-makers: (1) identify and define the problem with full clarity; (2) generate all possible alternative solutions; (3) evaluate alternatives against all relevant criteria; and (4) select the option that maximizes expected utility. This model assumes perfect information, unlimited cognitive capacity, stable and transitive preferences, and the absence of time constraints—conditions that virtually never obtain in real organizational life (March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1979).

Critics of the rational model have been numerous and diverse. Behaviorally, Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theory (1979) demonstrated that people systematically violate expected utility theory through loss aversion, probability distortions, and framing effects. Organizationally, Cyert and March (1963) documented how coalition formation, political bargaining, and sequential attention to goals produce decisions that reflect organizational power dynamics rather than utility maximization. Institutionally, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) showed that organizations often adopt practices not because they optimize performance but because they conform to isomorphic pressures from regulatory environments, professional norms, and mimetic processes.

2.2 Herbert Simon's Bounded Rationality: Core Propositions

Simon's bounded rationality model constitutes the most influential theoretical alternative to the classical rational model. Its core propositions are: (1) decision-makers operate within bounds set by cognitive limitations, informational incompleteness, and environmental complexity; (2) rather than maximizing, decision-makers satisfice—they search for and select solutions that are 'good enough' relative to an aspiration level; (3) decision procedures involve sequential search through a limited

subset of alternatives, halting when a satisfactory option is found; and (4) aspiration levels are adaptive, adjusting upward when satisfactory options are easily found and downward when search is prolonged or costly (Simon, 1955; 1979).

Simon was careful to distinguish bounded rationality from irrationality. Decision-makers are rational within their bounds—they employ procedures that are reasonable given their cognitive and informational constraints. This insight reframes the central question of decision research from 'why do people fail to be rational?' to 'how do people make good decisions given real constraints?' and opens productive inquiry into the cognitive heuristics, institutional structures, and social processes that enable reasonably effective decision-making in complex, uncertain environments (Simon, 1990).

2.3 Intuition in Managerial Decision-Making

The role of intuition in managerial decision-making has gained increasing theoretical and empirical attention since the 1990s, in part driven by Gary Klein's naturalistic decision-making research (Klein, 1998) and the dual-process theory of cognition developed by Stanovich and West (2000) and popularized by Kahneman's Thinking, Fast and Slow (2011). In dual-process frameworks, decision-making involves two interacting systems: System 1 (fast, automatic, pattern-recognition-based, emotional) and System 2 (slow, deliberate, rule-based, analytical).

Expert intuition, in Klein's recognition-primed decision model, is not arbitrary or mystical but represents the accumulated pattern recognition derived from extensive experience in complex, high-stakes environments. Experienced managers confronting familiar problem types rapidly recognize situational patterns and retrieve associated action scripts without engaging in conscious analytical deliberation. This intuitive expertise is both effective and efficient in conditions of time pressure and high decision complexity—conditions that characterize much of managerial reality (Klein, 2008; Dane & Pratt, 2007).

2.4 Organizational Culture and Decision-Making in Indonesian Contexts

Cross-cultural research on organizational decision-making has demonstrated significant variation in decision processes across national cultural contexts. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance are particularly relevant to Indonesian organizational contexts, where high power distance and collectivist norms create distinctive decision dynamics. High power distance contexts are characterized by centralized decision-making authority, deference to hierarchical superiors, and reluctance to disagree openly with authority figures—patterns that systematically constrain the information flows and deliberative processes that effective bounded rationality requires (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Indonesian organizational cultures additionally reflect the influence of Javanese cultural values including the concepts of ewuh pakewuh (reluctance to impose or disagree), musyawarah

mufakat (deliberative consensus-seeking), and bapakism (paternalistic leadership)—all of which shape the social dynamics within which managerial decisions are made and legitimated (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). These cultural frameworks may both constrain optimal decision-making (by limiting information sharing and honest dissent) and enable it (by fostering relational trust and cooperative problem-solving).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Systematic Review Methodology

A systematic review of peer-reviewed literature on managerial decision-making was conducted following PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Searches were conducted in Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar using search terms including 'managerial decision-making,' 'bounded rationality,' 'organizational decision,' 'intuition management,' and 'Simon satisficing.' Inclusion criteria required: (1) peer-reviewed empirical or theoretical articles; (2) published between 2010 and 2024; (3) focused on managerial decision-making in organizational contexts; (4) written in English or Indonesian. After screening 1,284 records, 87 studies met inclusion criteria and were synthesized using narrative synthesis methods.

3.2 Survey Design and Participants

A cross-sectional survey was administered to 245 senior managers from public and private organizations in Java, Indonesia, recruited through professional networks and snowball sampling. The Decision Style Inventory (DSI; Rowe & Mason, 1987), adapted and validated for the Indonesian managerial context ($\alpha = 0.84$), classified respondents into dominant decision styles. Supplementary instruments assessed organizational culture (using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument; Cameron & Quinn, 2011), perceived time pressure, decision complexity, and decision quality outcomes (self-reported achievement of intended decision objectives over the preceding 12 months).

3.3 Analytical Approach

Descriptive statistics characterized the distribution of decision styles across managerial levels, sectors, and demographic groups. One-way ANOVA and chi-square tests examined between-group differences. Hierarchical multiple regression assessed predictors of decision style preferences. Structural equation modeling (SEM) tested a hypothesized model in which decision style, managerial experience, and organizational culture jointly predict decision quality outcomes, mediated by integrative cognitive processing. AMOS 26 was used for SEM analysis; all other analyses were performed in SPSS 27.

Table 2. Distribution of Dominant Decision-Making Styles by Managerial Level

Managerial Level	Pure Rational (%)	Bounded Rationality (%)	Intuition-Dominant (%)	Mixed/Adaptive (%)	n

Top Management	10.6	38.5	36.5	14.4	52
Middle Management	18.4	51.0	24.5	6.1	98
Lower Management	22.1	56.8	17.9	3.2	95
Total Sample	**18.4**	**49.8**	**25.3**	**6.5**	**245**
$\chi^2(6) = 18.74$, $p = .005$					

Source: Decision Style Inventory survey data, 2024. Mixed/Adaptive = regularly switches style based on context.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Systematic Review Findings

The systematic review of 87 studies yielded several consistent findings. First, pure rational decision-making is rarely observed in naturalistic organizational settings; most empirical studies document significant departures from the classical model across diverse organizational types and national contexts (79 of 87 studies, 90.8%). Second, bounded rationality processes—particularly satisficing search, aspiration-level adaptation, and heuristic decision-making—are the modal pattern of managerial decision-making in complex environments (identified in 68 studies, 78.2%). Third, the integration of analytical and intuitive processes is associated with superior decision outcomes compared to exclusive reliance on either mode alone (supported in 42 of 52 studies examining this question, 80.8%).

The review also identified significant gaps: only 11 of 87 studies (12.6%) examined managerial decision-making in Southeast Asian contexts, and only 3 studies (3.4%) specifically addressed Indonesian organizational environments. This scarcity underscores the need for context-specific empirical research that the survey component of this study seeks to address.

4.2 Survey Findings: Prevalence and Predictors of Decision Styles

Bounded rationality satisficing strategies were the dominant decision style for 49.8% of managers, followed by intuition-dominant approaches (25.3%), pure rational approaches (18.4%), and mixed/adaptive approaches (6.5%). The distribution differed significantly across managerial levels ($\chi^2(6) = 18.74$, $p = .005$): top managers demonstrated higher rates of intuition-dominant decision-making (36.5%) compared to lower-level managers (17.9%), a pattern consistent with the greater decision complexity, time pressure, and accumulated experience characteristic of senior positions.

Hierarchical regression identified significant predictors of intuition-dominant decision-making: years of managerial experience ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$), perceived time pressure ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$), organizational culture type (clan culture: $\beta = 0.198$, $p = .003$), and decision complexity ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$). Predictors of pure rational decision-making included sector (public sector: $\beta = 0.224$, $p = .001$), lower managerial level ($\beta = -0.189$, $p = .004$), and availability of decision support systems ($\beta = 0.231$, $p < 0.001$). The full regression model explained 48.7% of variance in decision style preferences.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Predictors of Intuition-Dominant Decision-Making (N = 245)

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	ΔR²
Step 1: Demographic Controls						.089
Age	0.012	0.018	.048	0.67	.504	
Gender (male)	0.142	0.112	.074	1.27	.205	
Education level	0.198	0.134	.087	1.48	.141	
Step 2: Organizational Variables						.241
Managerial Experience (years)	0.287	0.054	.312	5.31	<.001	
Sector (private vs. public)	−0.198	0.112	−.102	−1.77	.079	
Clan Organizational Culture	0.214	0.074	.198	2.89	.003	
Step 3: Contextual Variables						.157
Perceived Time Pressure	0.241	0.051	.287	4.72	<.001	
Decision Complexity	0.198	0.049	.241	4.04	<.001	
Social Harmony Pressure (kerukunan)	0.174	0.058	.181	3.00	.003	
Total R^2 = .487, Adjusted R^2 = .462, $F(10, 234) = 22.2$, $p < .001$						

Source: Survey data analysis, SPSS 27, 2025.

4.3 Decision Quality Outcomes

Structural equation modeling revealed significant differences in self-reported decision quality across decision styles. Managers employing integrated bounded rationality approaches—combining satisficing analytical strategies with experiential intuition—reported the highest decision quality scores ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.58$ on a five-point scale). Pure intuition-dominant managers reported moderate quality ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.71$), while pure rational approach users reported the lowest quality ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.84$), likely reflecting the mismatch between the demanding requirements of comprehensive rationality and the real-world constraints within which Indonesian managers operate.

The SEM model (CFI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.058) revealed that the positive effect of managerial experience on decision quality was fully mediated through integrative cognitive processing (indirect effect: $\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational culture moderated this mediation: in hierarchical organizational cultures, the relationship between integrative processing and decision quality was significantly attenuated (β interaction = −0.198, $p = .004$), suggesting that even when managers employ effective cognitive strategies, rigid hierarchical constraints can undermine decision implementation and outcome quality.

Table 4. SEM Path Coefficients for Decision Quality Model (N = 245)

Pathway	β	SE	t	p	95% CI	Sig.
Experience → Integrative Processing	.412	.058	7.10	<.001	.298, .526	***
Bounded Rationality Style → Integrative	.338	.062	5.45	<.001	.216, .460	***

Processing						
Integrative Processing → Decision Quality	.489	.054	9.06	<.001	.383, .595	***
Clan Culture → Decision Quality (direct)	.201	.067	3.00	.003	.069, .333	**
Hierarchical Culture × Integrative → Quality	−.198	.071	−2.79	.004	−.337, −.059	**
Social Harmony (kerukunan) → Integrative	.164	.060	2.73	.006	.046, .282	**
Indirect: Experience → Quality (via Integrative)	.287	.048	5.98	<.001	.193, .381	***
Model: CFI = .954, RMSEA = .052 [90% CI: .034, .070], SRMR = .058, R^2(Quality) = .512						

Note: ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Source: SEM analysis, IBM AMOS 26, 2025.

Table 5. Comparative Analysis of Decision-Making Approaches: Key Characteristics

Dimension	Classical Rationality	Bounded Rationality	Intuition-Based	Integrated Approach
Information Processing	Comprehensive	Selective, heuristic	Pattern recognition	Adaptive & contextual
Optimization Goal	Maximizing	Satisficing	Immediate sufficiency	Situationally optimal
Time Required	Extensive	Moderate	Rapid	Flexible
Information Requirement	Complete	Partial	Experiential/tacit	Mixed
Best Suited For	Simple, stable, data-rich	Complex, uncertain	Time-pressured, expert domain	High-stakes, complex
Decision Quality (Survey M)	3.44 (SD=0.84)	3.89 (SD=0.61)	3.78 (SD=0.71)	4.12 (SD=0.58)
Key Theorists	Von Neumann, Savage	Simon (1947, 1955)	Klein (1998), Kahneman	Dane & Pratt (2007)

Source: Systematic review synthesis and survey data analysis, 2025.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the continued relevance and explanatory power of Simon's bounded rationality model in contemporary Indonesian organizational contexts. The dominance of satisficing strategies (49.8% of managers) over pure rational approaches (18.4%) confirms that the cognitive and informational constraints Simon identified in the 1940s and 1950s remain operative and consequential in the digital information era. The availability of decision support systems and big data analytics has not, as some optimists predicted, restored comprehensive rationality as the modal managerial decision mode; instead, it has added new information sources that must themselves be selectively processed under bounded rationality conditions.

The superior decision quality associated with integrated bounded rationality approaches—combining analytical satisficing with experiential intuition—extends and elaborates the theoretical

synthesis between dual-process cognition and bounded rationality that has emerged in recent organizational behavior literature (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Hodgkinson & Sadler-Smith, 2018). This finding has important implications for managerial development: rather than training managers to approach every decision analytically, development programs should cultivate the metacognitive capacity to recognize which decision contexts call for rapid intuitive pattern-matching, which require deliberate analytical processing, and which demand a dynamic integration of both.

The identification of social harmony pressure (kerukunan) as a significant predictor of intuition-dominant decision-making adds an important cultural dimension to the bounded rationality framework that has not previously been documented in the empirical literature. In organizational contexts characterized by strong norms of harmonious consensus-seeking, managers may be incentivized to rely on intuitive judgments—particularly those consistent with existing group consensus—rather than engaging in analytical reasoning that might surface unwelcome disagreements. While this dynamic can facilitate smooth implementation of accepted decisions, it simultaneously creates vulnerability to groupthink and motivated reasoning that distorts the quality of the decision itself.

The moderating effect of hierarchical organizational culture on the integrative processing-decision quality relationship deserves particular attention. Even when managers employ cognitively effective integrative strategies, rigid hierarchical structures can undermine decision quality by preventing the information sharing, honest dissent, and cross-functional collaboration that effective complex decision-making requires. This finding resonates with Simon's own observation that organizational structure constitutes a critical component of bounded rationality—the organizational environment shapes what information is available to decision-makers, what alternatives are considered legitimate, and what outcomes are evaluated (Simon, 1947). Organizations seeking to improve decision quality should thus attend to structural and cultural dimensions alongside individual managerial cognitive capacities.

The public-private sector differential observed in decision style distributions merits sociological analysis. Public sector managers' greater reliance on procedural rational approaches (despite their documented limitations) likely reflects the accountability structures, legal frameworks, and audit cultures of Indonesian government organizations, in which documentation of rational decision processes provides institutional legitimacy regardless of actual decision quality outcomes. This observation connects to neo-institutional theory's concept of decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977): formal rational decision procedures may be enacted as organizational ritual while actual decisions continue to be made through satisficing and intuitive processes.

6. CONCLUSION

This study makes three primary contributions to the literature on managerial decision-making. First, it provides one of the most comprehensive empirical examinations of managerial decision style distribution in the Indonesian organizational context, establishing that bounded rationality satisficing strategies are the modal approach (49.8%) while pure rational optimization is rare (18.4%). Second, it extends Simon's bounded rationality model to incorporate cultural variables—particularly social harmony norms and hierarchical organizational culture—that shape the expression of bounded rationality in Indonesian organizational settings in theoretically significant ways. Third, it demonstrates that decision quality outcomes are highest when managers integrate bounded rationality satisficing strategies with experiential intuition, a finding that advances the theoretical synthesis between Simon's model and dual-process cognitive frameworks.

These findings carry important practical implications for Indonesian organizations and management development programs. Managerial training should move beyond simplistic prescriptions for either comprehensive rationality or intuitive expertise, and instead develop managers' metacognitive capacity to flexibly integrate analytical and intuitive processes in context-appropriate ways. Organizations should examine how their structural and cultural features—particularly hierarchical power dynamics and social harmony norms—enable or constrain effective decision-making, and design governance structures that facilitate the information sharing and constructive dissent that complex decision-making requires.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how decision styles evolve with managerial experience, and should use behavioral observation methods to complement the self-report measures employed here. Experimental methods could examine how specific cultural variables—ewuh pakewuh, musyawarah mufakat—shape decision processes in controlled conditions. Cross-national comparative studies contrasting Indonesian managerial decision-making with decision processes in individualist, low power distance contexts would significantly advance understanding of the cultural boundary conditions of Simon's bounded rationality model.

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