

## Análisis de Decisiones para adolescentes en problemas

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Estimados suscriptores:

El análisis de decisiones se asocia típicamente a las grandes decisiones empresariales o institucionales, pero sabemos que es útil a cualquier persona que tome decisiones importantes. Y todos tomamos decisiones importantes respecto a nuestra propia vida (con efectos en la vida de los que nos rodean). Pero no todos tomamos buenas decisiones, y eso nos puede llevar a lugares indeseados.

Un caso claro de malas decisiones es la de los jóvenes delincuentes que terminan en centros de detención para menores. Muchas veces estos adolescentes ni siquiera se dan cuenta que fueron sus decisiones las que los llevaron ahí, y que son sus decisiones las que pueden moldear su vida. Muchos de ellos delinquen por la presión de sus compañeros, o inducidos por un adulto, o por que es "lo que todos hacen": no hay un proceso conciente de toma de decisiones.

Una vez que están en prisión ¿es muy tarde para enseñarles a estos jóvenes a tomar mejores decisiones? No lo es, muchos de ellos una vez que salen de prisión regresan a ella tras volver a delinquir (en Estados Unidos 85% de los jóvenes regresan a prisión).

Un pequeño grupo de profesores y alumnos universitarios de la University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, asociados a la *Decision Education Foundation*, están dando entrenamiento a jóvenes detenidos en el Centro de Detención Juvenil de Champaign County en Urbana, Illinois. Los jóvenes se han sorprendido al "descubrir" la cadena de relaciones entre decisiones y resultados (y verlos en un árbol de decisión) y han respondido muy favorablemente al concepto de que ellos sí pueden tomar decisiones (aún en ambientes difíciles) e influir su vida. En una siguiente etapa, la *Decision Education Foundation* entrenará a personal del Centro de Detención para que ellos mismo ayuden a los jóvenes detenidos.

Esta historia está reportada en el número de agosto de 2007 de *OR/MS Today* (editado por INFORMS) en el artículo "**Teaching Decision Skills to Troubled Teens**" por Ali Abbas, Nathan Hoffmann, Ronald Howard y Chris Spetzler.

Les anexo los primeros y el último párrafo del artículo.

Un cordial saludo.

*Roberto Ley Borrás*

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### **Teaching Decision Skills to Troubled Teens**

Non-profit foundation aims to help young people make better choices about their lives.

By Ali Abbas, Nathan Hoffmann, Ronald Howard and Chris Spetzler

The U.S. Department of Justice recorded 2.2 million juvenile arrests in 2003 [1]. Juvenile courts handled 1.6 million delinquency cases in 2002, up from 1.1 million in 1985. Nearly 25,000 16-year-olds in residential placement have an average stay of 105 days in public facilities, and about 85 percent of teens admitted into a juvenile detention center return at least once. For these young people, becoming involved with the juvenile detention system is a traumatic experience that carries with it the danger of being drawn into a cycle of repeated offenses.

Operations research professionals have received well-deserved attention for their contributions to improving the criminal justice system and making a significant impact on its pressing issues (see for example, Blumstein [2007] and Morgan [2007]). Our focus in this article is on our experience of teaching decision skills to the teens and officers of the Champaign County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) in Urbana, Ill. The program is led by Ali Abbas, assistant professor of Industrial and Enterprise Systems Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), in partnership with the Decision Education Foundation (DEF), a non-profit organization dedicated to helping young people make better decisions about their lives. Ronald Howard, one of the founders of the field of decision analysis, is president of the DEF.

DEF has designed and delivered innovative curricula for at-risk teens as well as programs for academically gifted and mainstream youth (for some recent work on teaching academically gifted teens see Abbas, Reiter, Spetzler and Tani [2004]). A long-time volunteer with the Decision Education Foundation and advisory board member, Abbas was instrumental in creating the partnership between the College of Engineering at UIUC, the Champaign County JDC and DEF.

The program started with an initial visit to meet Connie Kaiser, the superintendent of the Champaign County JDC, to tell her about the possibility of delivering decision-making workshops to teens. A sign posted at the entrance explained the mission of the JDC: "Only kids with the highest risk to harm others are detained for as little time as absolutely necessary, where caring, competent, compassionate staff are helping kids build skills for productive law-abiding lives, and reducing risk to re-offend."

It was clear to us that teaching decision skills fits well with the mission of the JDC. Kaiser recognized the value of this venture and embraced the idea of developing a program to help residents make better decisions.

#### TEACHING DECISION SKILLS AT THE JDC

We started with two, four-hour workshops for two groups of teens. Material delivered in the workshops was taken from the field of decision analysis and normative decision-making. While this material had long been tested with graduate students, a key objective in our endeavor was to test this material with teens at the JDC and to gather feedback for use in future workshops.

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#### ONGOING WORK

We have received positive feedback from the residents and the officers at the JDC. Kaiser continues to be very supportive and has agreed to send two officers on a longer-term training course at the Summer Institute sponsored by DEF at Stanford University. Upon their return, Abbas will provide them with the teaching material and know-how to teach decision-making to the residents. At this stage we are training more people at the JDC, building an online Q&A system for the teens and deriving measures of effectiveness for teaching decision skills at the JDC. We hope to see a drop in recidivism and success of the residents in making better decisions as they leave the JDC. As the program develops, we also plan to provide a model that can be incorporated into similar programs to help teens at juvenile detention centers throughout the country.

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