

Decision Functions Coding System

**Marshall Scott Poole
University of Minnesota**

**Joel Doelger
University of Arkansas**

Unitizing

1. A member's single communicative act is considered a unit of interaction.
2. A communicative act ends at the beginning of an utterance by another member or with a function change in the original speaker's utterance.
3. If an utterance overlaps but does not stop the current speaker, enter the interruption on the coding sheet after the current speaker turn. Show that an interruption occurred by linking the entries with a bracket ([]) in the "code" column (see Appendix 2).
4. When an utterance is cooperatively completed by another, code the completion as serving the same function(s) as the utterance is completed.
5. Multiple functions in an utterance will be coded as separate communicative acts. There is no limit to the number of functions coded in a single utterance.
6. Multiple coding for the same utterance is also allowed. For example, the same phrase may be coded "orientation" and "solution proposal" from the category system described below. One restriction is imposed, however: multiple codes can only be assigned between main classifications (indicated by numerals); no multiple codes are allowed within classes. So, the code 2a "orientation"-3a "solution guideline" is allowed, while the code 3a "solution guideline"-3b "solution proposal" is not. The latter should be separable into two consecutive communicative acts. Further hints on multiple coding: (a) If the entire utterance is a single sentence long, cross code the entire statement; (b) If the utterance is longer than a single sentence, but does not require cross coding of the entire utterance, cross code by splitting into discrete functional units. Indicate a cross-coded utterance by entering the codes in the "task code" column and separating them with a diagonal slash (/). When splitting a pre-transcribed entry into separate codes, using a horizontal line(--in the task column instead (see Appendix 2).
7. If you are transcribing and coding simultaneously be aware of extended monologues. If a long single-function utterance goes over 1 minute in length, assign one code to the first 60 second interval and make a new entry for each subsequent 30 second interval.
8. If the tape was previously transcribed and a single turn at talk has been entered on two or more lines, look for a functional change between the entries. If there is no change, enter the code in the appropriate column for the first entry and draw an arrow down to the entry where the function does change, or to the next speaker's turn at talk (see example in Appendix 2).

Categorizing

A. Basic Rules and Concepts

1. The system assumes that there are two ways in which groups may interpret a stimulus for a decision: (a) the group may interpret the stimulus as a problem or lack, or (b) the group may see the stimulus as a call to action with no real problem or lack. In the latter case, task definition occurs primarily through specification of the solution guidelines. Only when interaction focuses on a problem or lack should "Problem Activity" codes be employed.

2. Before coding it is critical to define the group's task because this will determine what acts are solutions, problem analyses, etc.

3. For classifications 1 through 3, all codes consist of a numeral followed by a letter indicating the main classification and subunit within that classification (e.g., 1a or 3b). Further subclassifications (e.g., i. iv, etc.) are for illustrative purposes. So the data should not be coded at this level of specificity.

B. Classifications

1. Problem Activity

a. Problem Analysis: This category applies where the group perceives a lack or difficulty and moves to diagnose or understand it. It includes statements that identify and clarify the nature of the problem, its symptoms and seriousness, or its causes.

b.

Problem Analysis Evaluation: Arguments for or against a problem analysis statement. Coded as (+) or (?) depending on their valence. An evaluation statement is any that can be translated into a "because" format.

2. Executive Activity

a. Orientation: These are statements that orient the group to its work and specify the process the group will follow in working on its task. Orientation statements include:

i. Summaries of previous decisions or actions taken by the group.

ii. Comments on time and resource limits.

iii. Statements on how the group should organize its discussion.

iv. Transitions from one line of work to another, (e.g., "OK, we have a good list of ideas. Now let's evaluate them)."

v. Pacing or timekeeping statements.

vi. Statements directly stating goals or purposes of the group.

vii. Statements of the issues or alternatives before the group without making a judgment or evaluation of them.

viii. Simple request for repetition and clarification of statements.

Not requests for elaboration, but of the "I could hear what you said" variety. Answers to such repetition requests are also coded as 2a.

- b. Reflection: Statements that reflect on or evaluate ongoing group process. Also includes self-reflective and evaluative statements. Complementing group progress. These usually sound judgmental.

NOTE: Technically, Executive Activities could be evaluated, but since this seldom happens we will consider such evaluations further Executive Activity.

3. Solution Development

- a. Solution Guidelines: A general statement of a solution or the principles behind it. Guidelines characterize what the group should do in nonconcrete terms. Guidelines also include criteria statements that lay out in general terms the qualities or characteristics of a good solution. Guidelines define the area or topic of interest in "non-problem-oriented" terms, they are not concrete steps toward a solution, (e.g., "Let's choose a project related to library reserves..." Because this is only said in general terms, it is a guideline for an emerging solution.

This would include questions that ask for general guidelines: "What topic should we use?" How about bicycle safety on campus."

- b. Solution Proposal: Any concrete, particular, specific proposal for action, (e.g., "let's establish a computerized reserve system...").

Includes any proposed bargain, whether new or if added to another person's proposal. Each step of a sequence of proposals is coded as a separate proposal. Example: "For the class first we'll show that videotape about drug abuse. Following that we'll have a class discussion about drug attitudes. And then we'll give them the lecture on birth defects related to LSD use."

- c. Solution Elaboration: Any statement that modifies, elaborates, qualifies, or provides details on solution proposals or bargains. It includes combining or scheduling proposals, assigning duties directly connected to the implementation of a proposal to members and considering what is involved in putting the proposal into action. It also includes statements that give data about the solution in neutral fashion.
- d. Solution Evaluation: Arguments for or against a guideline proposal or elaboration statement. These are coded as (+), (?), or (/) depending on their valence. A indicates disagreement with the standing proposal, not simply a statement worded in a negative way (see Appendix 2). A(/) is used on requests for evaluation. An evaluation statement is any that can be translated into a "because" format. If a solution is proposed and evaluated simultaneously, enter the turn as though it were 2 separate turns. The first entry should be the proposal and the second should be treated as an evaluation (i.e., 3b followed by 3d).
- e. Solution Confirmation: Statements confirming or asking for confirmation of a proposal. These are coded (/) or (+) as follows:

/ = Calling for a vote or asking for final confirmation.

(+) = Stating the proposal in the form of a decision; stating a favorable vote in response to a call for a vote (negative votes are coded as negative solution evaluations i.e., as 3d); or urging someone to confirm the decision once confirmation is called for (e.g., "C'mon, c'mon, vote for it.").

- = Any argumentation (i.e., A negative comment to a confirmation), reasoning, or elaboration attached to the vote is coded under 3c or 3d.

4. Nontask: Statements unrelated to task work. These include tangents, laughter, side issues, off the track personal narratives (story sharing). Also includes all ambiguous (non-evaluative) backchannels (e.g., "oh, um, ugh"). Only code backchannels as a 5 or 6 if they express agreement or disagreement.

5. Simple Agreement: Statements expressing agreement with another communicative act, but which do not give reasons or justification, (e.g., "Yeah," "uh?huh," "I agree with that." "That's a good idea,"). Statements which agree and also give reasons are coded under 1b or 3d.

6. Simple Disagreement: Statements expressing disagreement with another communicative act, but which do not give reasons or justifications. Statements which disagree and also give reasons are coded under 1b or 3d.

7. Inaudible: If the function cannot be distinguished because it is inaudible, use this category.