Decision Making Modes

	GOAL AMBIGUITY / CONFLICT	
	Low	*High*
Rational mode • Goal-directed • Guided by rules, routines and performance programs		**Political mode** • Conflicting goals, interests • Certainty about preferred approach and outcomes
Process mode • Goal-directed • Multiple options and alternative solutions		**Anarchic mode** • Goals are ambiguous • Processes to reach goals are unclear

PROCEDURAL UNCERTAINTY (Low → High)

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Conditions leading to anarchy mode of decision making:

- **Preferences, goals are problematic**

- **Technology is unclear**

- **Participation is fluid**

Decisions are the outcomes of interactions between 4 *independent* streams of events

- **Problems**   • **Solutions**

- **Participants**   • **Choice Opportunities**

(Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; March and Olsen 1976; Cohen and March 1986)

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Garbage Can Processes

- **Choice opportunities are like garbage cans**

    … into which problems, solutions are dumped by participants as they are generated

Decisions happen

when solutions are attached to problems by participants.
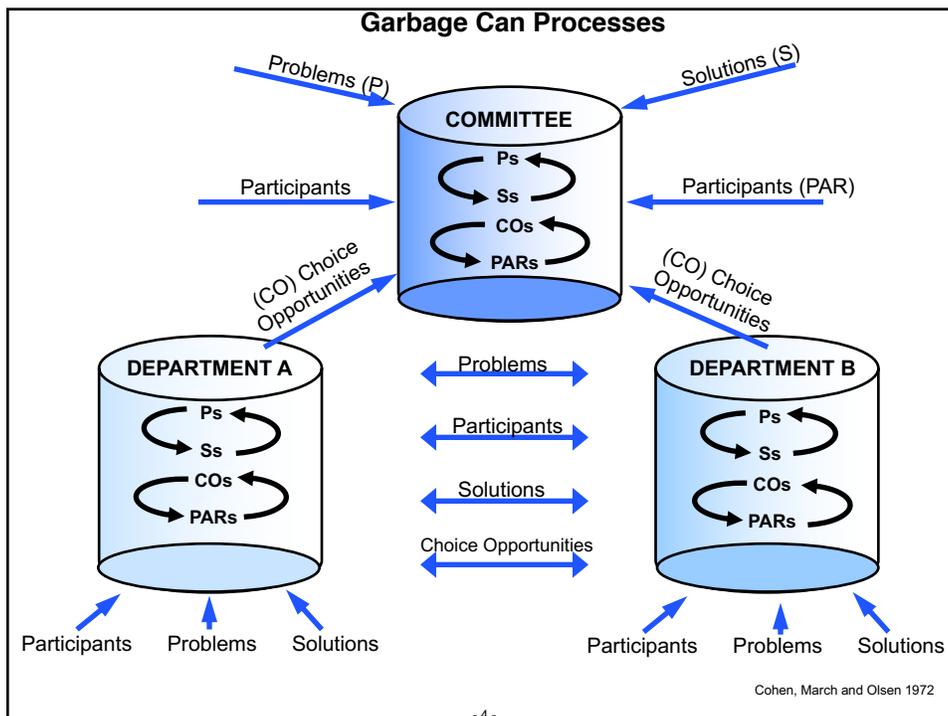
Depends on:

Who or which participants happen to be on the scene

When solutions or problems are entered

What other problems, solutions, choices are in the mix.

Cohen, March and Olsen 1972

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Garbage Can Processes

Cohen, March and Olsen 1972

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Garbage can decision making in the textbook publishing industry

Goals are problematic:
Successful textbook is the goal. Success and failure are poorly defined – a textbook that sells poorly may still be considered a success, and vice versa
Technology / Methods are unclear:
Editors describe their work in gambling terms – manuscripts thought to be well written but may not sell well
Participation is fluid:
Editors change departments and publishing houses frequently

GARBAGE CAN MODE OF DECISION MAKING to select textbooks for courses
Textbooks look for courses for which they might be adopted →
Solutions look for problems for which they are the answer.
Courses look for instructors who are interested in teaching them →
Problems look for participants to take ownership of the problem.
Decisions happen when textbooks are proposed by editors and selected by instructors who see a 'fit' between the text and their view of the subject →
Decisions happen when solutions are attached to problems by participants.

Levitt and Nass 1989

Garbage can decision making in policy making (John Kingdon)

Government can be viewed as an organized anarchy.
Actors (politicians) change with election cycles.
Problems arise from current events, and are modulated by media coverage.
Multiple participants pursue different, often conflicting, goals.
Policies proposed by think tanks or interest groups, but these policies gain attention only when the right situation arises that promotes their relevance.
Decisions happen when **actors and groups (participants)** make the effort to **connect solutions (policies) to issues (problems) in 'policy windows' (choice opportunities).**

Policy making may be conceived as "three process streams flowing through the system—streams of problems, policies [solutions], and politics [participants]. They are largely independent of one another, and each develops according to its own dynamics and rules. But at some critical junctures ['policy windows'] the three streams are joined, and the greatest policy changes grow out of that coupling of problems, policy proposals, and politics" (Kingdon 1995, p. 19).

Garbage Can Processes

Decisions happen in 3 ways

- **Oversight** ... **choice is made quickly, incidentally to other choices being made**

- **Flight** ... **original problem has flown away, leaving a choice that can now be made**

- **Resolution** ... **choice resolves problem**

(Cohen, March and Olsen 1972)

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Garbage Can Processes

"Should we develop capability in a new technology?"

- **Oversight** ... **major customer is committed to using the technology ...**

- **Flight** ... **technology is found to be unsafe or unreliable ...**

- **Resolution** ... **evaluate options and decide to develop training program ...**

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Garbage Can Consequences

- **Solutions may be proposed even when problems do not exist**

- **Choices are made without solving problems**

- **Problems may persist without being solved**

- **A few problems do get solved**

(Cohen, March and Olsen 1972)

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Technology of Foolishness

Technology of Reason vs Technology of Foolishness

**We should act first and let our actions show us what to think:
try some new way of doing things → clarify or discover goals and methods**

A different mindset, treat:
- Goals as hypotheses to be changed

- Intuitions as real

- Hypocrisy as transitional inconsistency

- Memory as enemy of novelty and innovation

- Experience as tentative theory of what has happened

Playfulness in Decision Making
"From time to time, we should be playfully foolish inside our garbage cans."

(March and Olsen 1976)

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An organization is

> **a collection of choices looking for problems,**
>
> **issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired,**
>
> **solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and**
>
> **decision makers looking for work.**

(Cohen, March and Olsen. 1972. A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. ASQ 17(1): p. 2)

Garbage Can Decision Making Case
Elimination of the Program in Speech

(March, James G., and Johan P. Olsen. 1976. Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations: pg. 254 - 258)

Case Study Questions

1. In what ways were goals and processes unclear and problematic?

2. In what ways was participation fluid?

3. Do you observe decision making by flight?

4. Do you observe decision making by oversight?

5. How would you characterize the decision making in this case?