

What failed drug busts are teaching world leaders about decision making

January 21 2016



A failed drug bust is providing World Economic Forum delegates with new insights into leadership and decision making, thanks to research by Dr Cinla Akinci of the University of St Andrews' School of Management.

At a private round-table event in Davos tomorrow (Thursday 21 January, 2016) delegates will consider the work of Dr Akinci who has studied police organisations in the United Kingdom to illustrate intuition-based decision processes in the context of both [police law enforcement](#) and senior police management teams.

Her research, based on focus group interviews with serving officers, looked at a number of case-studies including a "week of action" against drug dealers which turned into a PR disaster when intelligence received was not thoroughly analysed.

Strong intelligence was being received from various sources suggesting a number of well-known drug dealers were linked to one particular address. On visiting the address the "[gut feeling](#)" of the police constable leading the drug search operation was that there was certainly drug activity going on at this address: the curtains were always closed, the garden was a mess, and the state of the property corroborated the intelligence they were receiving.

The PC and his team were highly experienced officers in executing drug search warrants and had high success rates in similar jobs. Because it was a week of action, the police invited the local press to go along with them. However the intelligence unit had not done a comprehensive investigation to confirm that the subjects were current residents at the targeted address. As soon as the sergeant entered the house, her immediate "gut feeling" was that this was not the right address. Officers then quickly confirmed that the subjects of the warrant had moved out of the address some time ago, and the current residents were unrelated.

Dr Akinci has investigated similar stories of 'intuitive hits' and 'intuitive misses' to propose a framework for effective [decision making](#), requiring intuitions not to be dismissed but complemented by use of comprehensive analysis.

Dr Akinci explains: "The reason for studying the police is because they are highly experienced decision makers, often called upon to make quick judgements, and demonstrate the leadership skills valued most by business leaders and across other professions. There are many potential benefits of using intuitive judgments for police officers and managers

alike: for example, it can help to accelerate the decision-making process by identifying similar patterns through prior experience and learning. In this respect, intuition should be seen as a skill to improve decision making in appropriate circumstances.

"Informed intuition can be a valuable source of competitive advantage for organisations which is rare and difficult to imitate. However, as powerful as intuition might be, managers should also be aware of its dangers because misguided intuitions can lead us astray. In essence, evidence suggests that for effective decision making, intuition and analysis should complement one another."

Smart data, and its promise of rational, quantifiable insights, is changing and complicating the way modern leaders are making decisions across industries. In a world swept by predictive and analytic data trusting something as abstract as intuition seems risky, however Dr Akinci's research shows that to rely solely on data would be misguided. Her analysis suggests the solution lies in a tailored mix of verifiable data and intuition backed by years of personal experience and business savvy; the challenge is finding the balance.

Her work will help leaders to consider some of the big questions including how to balance data and intuition? When to step back from the numbers and trust your gut? Do boards of directors value and respect intuition? And does data fuel or limit creativity?

Provided by University of St Andrews

Citation: What failed drug busts are teaching world leaders about decision making (2016, January 21) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-drug-world-leaders-decision.html>

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