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Assisting Building Owners to Make Informed Decisions Regarding Seismic Mitigation Implementation

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Associate Professor Suzanne Wilkinson,
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ABSTRACT

This research examines the problems of reducing the impact of natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, on the built environment and the community. The research aim is to determine a method of assisting building owners to make informed decisions on seismic mitigation implementation of their substandard buildings. Generalised knowledge of this decision situation can then be uncovered to help building owners and other mitigation actors to structure and deal with similar situations elsewhere in New Zealand.

Considering the research paradigm, the research nature and the research commitment of this dissertation, four main research methods, under the qualitative research category, are employed to accomplish the research aim. They include a literature review, extensive interviews, and case studies, with the case study method being the overarching methodological strategy. An extensive literature review was carried out to examine the existing research focus of decision-making in seismic risk mitigation, which started to reveal the reasons of slow progress in implementing seismic mitigation. As one of the output of this literature review, Decision Analysis is examined as a method to assist building owners to make informed decisions. Accordingly, a series of interviews including various mitigation actors across the country were carried out to determine the key considerations in the decision making environment. Three real-life projects are studied to identify the characteristics of building owner's decision-making processes in a project environment. The characteristics of the decision problem of implementing seismic mitigation are then compared to those of the decision problem analysed by Decision Analysis to ascertain that Decision Analysis, especially Value-focused thinking Decision Analysis is the appropriate one to be used as a method to develop a decision framework in assisting building owners. The decision framework is then applied to two realistic, comprehensive projects to test the model by checking whether the framework is able to grasp the decision environment; whether the framework is able to illustrate and represent the building owner's thoughts; whether the framework is able to be administered in hindsight; whether an audit trail of the decision-making can be made.

The insight into the decision problem gained through the current research ascertained that Decision Analysis is a much better and more appropriate method to assist building owners than the traditional method, Cost Benefit Analysis. The main reason is that Decision Analysis is able to account for the intertwined features of the decision problem and evaluate the factors that are difficult to be quantified. Thus, this method should be applied to assist New Zealand building owners to make an informed decision in seismic mitigation implementation.

Key word: Decision Analysis, Seismic Mitigation Implementation, Decision Aid, Building Owners

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LIST OF CONTENT

- ABSTRACTi
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iii
- LIST OF CONTENT iv
- LISTS OF TABLES x
- LISTS OF FIGURES.....xiii

- Chapter 1 Introduction..... 1
 - 1.1 Overview 1
 - 1.2 Research Background..... 1
 - 1.3 Problem Statement..... 5
 - 1.4 Research Objectives..... 7
 - 1.5 Research Outline 9

- Chapter 2 Seismic Mitigation 11
 - 2.1 Introduction 11
 - 2.2 Mitigation 11
 - 2.3 Mitigation decision-making 13
 - 2.4 Mitigation Tools 16
 - 2.4.1 Warning mechanisms and land use management 17
 - 2.4.2 Insurance 18
 - 2.4.3 Building codes 20
 - 2.4.4 Engineering 25
 - 2.5 Key mitigation actors in New Zealand 28
 - 2.6 Mitigation implementation policies and process in New Zealand 30
 - 2.6.1 TA policy development and evaluation process 30

2.6.2	Mitigation policies implementation approaches	37
2.6.3	Issues raised by NZSEE regarding policy implementation	40
2.7	Previous studies in mitigation decision-making	43
2.7.1	Previous studies in New Zealand	43
2.7.2	Previous studies Internationally	48
2.8	Discussion	53
Chapter 3	Decision Analysis	57
3.1	Introduction	57
3.2	Decision Analysis	57
3.2.1	What is Decision Analysis	57
3.2.2	The purpose of Decision Analysis	59
3.2.3	Application	60
3.3	Alternative-focused thinking versus Value-focused thinking	62
3.4	Decision Analysis Methodology	66
3.5	Procedures and elements of Decision Analysis	69
3.5.1	Structure the Decision Problem	69
3.5.2	Assess Possible Impacts of Each Alternatives	72
3.5.3	Determine Preferences of Decision Makers	74
3.5.4	Evaluate and Compare Alternatives	83
3.6	Software	84
3.7	Conclusion	84
Chapter 4	Research Methodology and Design	87
4.1	Introduction	87
4.2	Research Process	87
4.3	Research Design	90
4.4	Research Methods Used	92
4.4.1	Literature review	93
4.4.2	Interviews	94
4.4.3	Case study method	99
4.5	Data collection	105
4.6	Data analysis	107

4.6.1	Interview data analysis	107
4.6.2	Case study data analysis	108
4.7	Trustworthiness	109
4.8	Summary	110
Chapter 5	Decision Environment	112
5.1	Introduction	112
5.2	Interview Methodology	112
5.3	Key considerations in decision-making environment	116
5.3.1	Risk	118
5.3.2	Regulatory requirements	120
5.3.3	Costs	123
5.3.4	Existing Building performance.....	126
5.3.5	Benefits	128
5.3.6	Technical assistance.....	131
5.3.7	Liability	134
5.3.8	Market and economic conditions.....	135
5.3.9	Future usage	138
5.3.10	Ownership	140
5.3.11	Profile of the decision-maker	143
5.3.12	Government financial aids.....	146
5.4	Difficulties in decision-making	147
5.4.1	Diverse options	148
5.4.2	Issues of implementation process	149
5.4.3	Complicated decision-making environment.....	151
5.5	Summary	154
Chapter 6	Examination of Decision Making Process and Illustrative Application of Decision Analysis	155
6.1	Introduction	155
6.2	Case study methodology.....	155
6.3	Examination of decision-making process in a project background.....	156
6.3.1	Case Study 1: Dilworth Building.....	157

6.3.2	Case Study 2: St Augustine’s Church	166
6.3.3	Case Study 3: Remuera Baptist Church	174
6.4	Characteristics of decision making process	186
6.5	Seismic mitigation implementation and Decision Analysis	189
6.5.1	Decision problem of seismic mitigation implementation	189
6.5.2	Decision problem analyzed by Decision Analysis.....	192
6.6	Illustrative Application of Decision Analysis	194
6.7	Conclusion	211
Chapter 7	Decision Framework Application: Case Study 4	213
7.1	Introduction	213
7.2	Project background.....	214
7.2.1	Organisation description	215
7.2.2	Site description	216
7.2.3	Chronological background	218
7.3	Decision Environment	221
7.3.1	Mitigation Actors.....	221
7.3.2	Considerations of Building owner’s context.....	222
7.3.3	Considerations of other mitigation actors.....	224
7.3.4	Summary	225
7.4	Applying Value-Focused Thinking Decision Analysis.....	225
7.4.1	Structure the decision problem	226
7.4.2	Assess Possible Impacts of Each Alternative.....	232
7.4.3	Determine Preferences of Decision-Makers	237
7.4.4	Evaluate and Compare Alternatives	252
7.5	Feedback.....	255
7.5.1	Territorial Authority.....	255
7.5.2	New Zealand Historic Places Trust	258
7.6	Conclusion	260
Chapter 8	Decision Framework Application: Case study 5.....	262
8.1	Introduction	262
8.2	Project Background	262

8.2.1	Organization description	263
8.2.2	Site description	264
8.2.3	Chronological background.....	265
8.3	Decision Environment.....	267
8.3.1	Mitigation actors	267
8.3.2	Considerations of Building owner's context	268
8.3.3	Available options	271
8.3.4	Discussion	274
8.4	Applying Value-Focused Thinking Decision Analysis	278
8.4.1	Structure the decision problem.....	278
8.4.2	Assess possible impacts of each alternative	286
8.4.3	Determine preference of decision-maker	289
8.4.4	Evaluate and compare alternatives.....	302
8.5	Feedback	308
8.5.1	Council Controlled Organization Unit.....	309
8.5.2	Strategic Business Unit	312
8.6	Cross-cases analysis.....	313
8.6.1	Key considerations	317
8.6.2	Building typology.....	319
8.6.3	Characteristics of Fundamental objectives.....	320
8.6.4	Uncertainty.....	324
8.7	Conclusion.....	325
Chapter 9	Conclusions.....	326
9.1	Introduction	326
9.2	Substantive review.....	326
9.2.1	The advantages of the decision framework	331
9.3	Contributions	334
9.3.1	Building owners	334
9.3.2	Other mitigation actors.....	335
9.4	Limitations.....	336
9.5	Future research.....	337
9.5.1	Decision Context.....	338

9.5.2	Fundamental objectives	338
9.5.3	Other Decision Analysis Methods	339
9.5.4	Assumptions used in the model	340
9.5.5	Consolidation with other research results	341
Reference:	344
Appendix A:	Interview Protocol	358
Appendix B:	Case Study Protocol.....	366
Appendix C:	Sensitivity Analysis of Risk Tolerance (Case Study 4).....	368
Appendix D:	Sensitivity Analysis of Risk Tolerance (Case Study 5)	370

LISTS OF TABLES

Table 1.1: New Zealand’s most significant earthquakes (Earthquake Commission and GNS Science 2009) 3

Table 2.1: Grades for buildings based on design load level compared to NZS 4203:1992 (for intermediate soils) (Davenport 2004)..... 23

Table 2.2: Resident Population in Main Urban Areas (Statistics New Zealand 2009) ...32

Table 2.3: Building Grading System for Earthquake Risk (Jury 2006)41

Table 3.1: Number of applications articles by application area, with trends (Keefer et al. 2002).....61

Table 3.2: Devices to use in identifying objectives (Keeney 1994)..... 70

Table 4.1: Summary of interviewed organisations.....97

Table 5.1: Summary of Interviewed Territorial Authority..... 113

Table 5.2: Summary of Interviewed Building Owners 114

Table 5.3: Summary of Interviewed Practical Professional 114

Table 5.4: Summary of Interviewed Other Interested Parties 115

Table 5.5: The decision-making environment: Key considerations..... 117

Table 5.6: Responses of participants mentioning Existing building performance as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment..... 126

Table 5.7: Responses of participants mentioning “Benefits” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment 128

Table 5.8: Responses of participants mentioning “Technical assistance” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment 132

Table 5.9: Responses of participants mentioning Liability as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment 134

Table 5.10: Responses of participants mentioning “Market and economic conditions” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment..... 136

Table 5.11: Responses of participants mentioning “Future usage” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment..... 139

Table 5.12: Responses of participants mentioning “Ownership” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment..... 141

Table 5.13: Responses of participants mentioning “Profile of the decision-maker” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment 144

Table 5.14: Responses of participants mentioning “Government financial aids” as one of the considerations in the decision-making environment..... 146

Table 6.1: Cross-cases analysis 186

Table 6.2: Summary of Characteristics concluded	189
Table 6.3: Objectives and Attributes for the Dilworth Building	197
Table 6.4: Attributes relating to alternatives	198
Table 6.5: Probability and consequence of attribute X_2 total costs.....	198
Table 6.6: Weight of each attribute	203
Table 6.7: Overall value.....	205
Table 6.8: Expected Value.....	206
Table 6.9: Certainty equivalent values for each alternative.....	207
Table 6.10: Sensitivity analysis of w_1	208
Table 6.11: Sensitivity analysis of ρ_m multiattribute risk tolerance	210
Table 7.1: Objectives and attributes for Building 5.....	231
Table 7.2: Building costs per square metre.....	233
Table 7.3: Probability and consequences of attribute X_1 total costs.....	234
Table 7.4: Probability and consequences of attribute X_5 disruption after earthquake	235
Table 7.5: Payoff table for each alternative	236
Table 7.6: Sensitivity analysis of w_3	253
Table 8.1: Priority for assessing and strengthening earthquake-prone building (Wellington City Council 2006b)	269
Table 8.2: Estimates of the three strengthening schemes	272
Table 8.3: Summary of three options.....	277
Table 8.4: Objectives and Attributes for City Gallery.....	284
Table 8.5: Payoff table for each alternative	288
Table 8.6: Value of X_2	291
Table 8.7: Estimated costs for each alternative	292
Table 8.8: Value of X_5	294
Table 8.9: Value of X_6	295
Table 8.10: Priority list of attributes	296
Table 8.11: Sensitivity analysis of three top weights	302
Table 8.12: Sensitivity analysis: X_3 Costs of Council funding	304
Table 8.13: Sensitivity analysis: X_5 impact on securing non-Council funding.....	305
Table 8.14: Sensitivity Analysis: Priority list.....	307
Table 8.15: Main considerations of case studies	315

Table 8.16: Summary of Cross-cases findings.....	316
Table 8.17: URM typology description.....	320
Table 8.18: Weights attached to each attribute in the case studies	323

LISTS OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Risk Management Decision-Making (Earthquake Engineering Research Institute 2000).....	15
Figure 2.2: Risk management framework (Petak 2001).....	31
Figure 2.3: Process for Developing TA policy (Department of Building and Housing 2004).....	34
Figure 2.4: Outline of evaluation process (Department of Building and Housing 2004).....	36
Figure 2.5: Outlines of Steps in Active Approach (NZSEE 2006).....	38
Figure 2.6: Outline of steps in passive programme (NZSEE 2006).....	39
Figure 2.7:Analysts vs. Organizations perspectives (Petak 2001).....	55
Figure 3.1: Benefits of applying value-focused thinking (Keeney 1994).....	64
Figure 3.2: A dynamic approach to decision problem structuring (Corner et al. 2001).....	65
Figure 3.3: Decision Analysis procedure (Howard 1968).....	67
Figure 3.4: Decomposition of Decision Analysis methodology (Keeney 1982).....	68
Figure 3.5: Utility function of risk-averse.....	79
Figure 3.6: Utility function of risk-seeking.....	79
Figure 3.7: Utility function of risk-neutral.....	80
Figure 4.1: Research framework.....	89
Figure 4.2: Seismic zoning schemes (NZS 4203:1984).....	96
Figure 6.1: Dilworth Building.....	159
Figure 6.2: St Augustine’s Church.....	168
Figure 6.3: Site Location of Remuera Baptist Church.....	177
Figure 6.4: Remuera Baptist Church.....	178
Figure 6.5: Manoeuvring and Parking Space Dimensions (Auckland City Council 1999).....	182
Figure 6.6: Objective Hierarchy of the Dilworth Building.....	196
Figure 6.7: Single dimensional attribute function of X_1	199
Figure 6.8: Single dimensional attribute function of X_3	201
Figure 6.9: Single dimensional attribute function of X_4	202
Figure 6.10: Single dimensional attribute function of X_5	203
Figure 6.11: Sensitivity analysis of w_1 minimise legal liability.....	209
Figure 6.12: Sensitivity analysis of ρ_m multiattribute risk tolerance.....	211

Figure 7.1: Building 5	217
Figure 7.2: Keeney's four-step decomposition methodology (Keeney 1982)	226
Figure 7.3: Objectives hierarchy for managing ADHB building inventory	228
Figure 7.4: Single dimensional attribute function of X_1	239
Figure 7.5: Single dimensional attribute function of X_2	240
Figure 7.6: Single dimensional attribute function of X_3	241
Figure 7.7: Single dimensional attribute function of X_4	242
Figure 7.8: Single dimensional attribute function of X_5	243
Figure 7.9: Single Dimensional Function of X_6	244
Figure 7.10: Overall value of each alternative	248
Figure 7.11: Decision tree with standard rollback procedure	251
Figure 7.12: Sensitivity analysis of w_3	254
Figure 7.13: Sensitivity analysis of multiattribute risk tolerance.....	255
Figure 7.14: Overall value of Territorial Authority	257
Figure 8.1: The City Gallery Wellington	265
Figure 8.2: Objective Hierarchy of the City Gallery.....	279
Figure 8.3: Single dimension attribute function of X_1	290
Figure 8.4: Single dimension attribute function of X_2	291
Figure 8.5: Single dimensional attribute function of X_3	293
Figure 8.6: Single dimensional attribute function of X_4	294
Figure 8.7: Single dimensional attribute function of X_5	295
Figure 8.8 Single dimensional attribute function of X_6	296
Figure 8.9: Overall value of each alternative	299
Figure 8.10: Decision tree with standard rollback procedure	301
Figure 8.11: Sensitivity analysis of three top weights	303
Figure 8.12: Sensitivity analysis: X_3 Costs of Council funding	305
Figure 8.13: Sensitivity analysis: X_5 impact on securing non-Council funding.....	306
Figure 8.14: Sensitivity Analysis: Priority list	307
Figure 8.15: Sensitivity analysis of multiattribute risk tolerance.....	308