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Mitigating Cognitive Bias to Improve Organizational Decisions: An Integrative Review, Framework, and Research Agenda

Fasolo et al (2024)

Context

It's well known that cognitive biases can have a negative impact on decision making and organisational influence however there is little evidence regarding interventions that mitigate these biases.

This paper provides a framework to select the most suitable evidence-based approach for improving decision-making processes based on decision, organisational and individual-level factors that moderate the intervention's effectiveness.

Key Insights

Two distinct bias-mitigation approaches

Debiasing:

- Targets the decision-maker
- Uses training, feedback, prompts to recognise own biases and counter them
- Requires cognitive effort and engagement
- Effectiveness depends on motivation, time and cognitive capacity

Choice Architecture:

- Targets the decision environment
- Uses defaults, framing, structure and simplification
- Low cognitive effort
- Often easier to scale, but less flexible across contexts

Framework

Bias-mitigation interventions are moderate by decision, organisational and individual-level factors. The following tables provide an overview of the authors view of when each intervention approach is more effective.

Decision-level Factor	Prefer Debiasing When...	Prefer Choice Architecture When...
Complexity	Decision is complex, novel, or multi-attribute	Decision is simple or rule-based
Frequency	Infrequent, high-stakes decisions	Frequent, repetitive decisions
Time pressure	Low to moderate time pressure	High time pressure
Uncertainty	Outcomes are ambiguous or evolving	Outcomes are well-defined
Decision stage	Judgment and evaluation phases	Information framing and final choice
Error tolerance	Learning and revision are acceptable	Errors are costly or irreversible



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Organisational-level Factor	Prefer Debiasing When...	Prefer Choice Architecture When...
Decision autonomy	Individuals have discretion over decisions	Decisions are standardised or centralised
Organizational culture	Reflection, challenge, and transparency are encouraged	Compliance and consistency are emphasized
Trust in leadership	High trust supports acceptance of training and feedback	Low trust favours less visible nudges
Incentives and accountability	Incentives align with accuracy and learning	Incentives are misaligned or noisy
Scalability needs	Small or specialized decision populations	Large-scale, organization-wide decisions

Individual-level Factor	Prefer Debiasing When...	Prefer Choice Architecture When...
Expertise / domain knowledge	Decision-makers are experienced and knowledgeable	Decision-makers are novices or heterogeneous
Motivation to improve accuracy	High motivation and accountability are present	Motivation is low or variable
Cognitive capacity / load	Sufficient time and mental resources are available	Cognitive load or fatigue is high
Bias awareness	Individuals can recognise and reflect on bias	Bias awareness is low or uneven
Learning orientation	Organisation values skill development	Immediate performance matters more than learning

Implications

- There is no one-size fits all intervention, so how are you assessing your decision-making context?
- How could you combine debiasing and choice architecture interventions?
- Have you tried any debiasing / choice architecture interventions? Which ones worked best and how do the results align with the framework above?