



Better Decisions, Stronger Leaders: Solving the Decision-Making Challenge



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Introduction

In an era defined by rapid change, complexity, and uncertainty, effective decision-making has become a differentiator for successful organizations. Leaders are expected to make faster, higher-stakes decisions with incomplete information—while balancing short-term performance and long-term sustainability. Yet, organizations continue to face significant barriers in building the decision-making capacity of their leaders.

Key Challenges

1. Complexity and Uncertainty

- Business environments shaped by global disruption, digital transformation, and geopolitical shifts make decisions more complex.
- Leaders struggle with ambiguity and the speed required to act without complete data.

2. Cognitive Bias and Blind Spots

- Overconfidence, confirmation bias, and groupthink frequently undermine decisions.
- Homogenous leadership teams limit diversity of thought and innovation.



3. Data Overload vs. Insight

- Organizations collect massive amounts of data but lack mechanisms to translate it into actionable insights.
- Leaders risk “analysis paralysis” or, conversely, ignoring data in favor of intuition.

4. Leadership Readiness and Development

- Many leaders lack training in structured decision-making frameworks.
- Insufficient investment in critical thinking, scenario planning, and adaptive leadership.

5. Culture and Accountability

- Organizational cultures that punish failure discourage bold decision-making.
- Lack of clear accountability structures creates delays and diluted outcomes.

Moving Forward: Best Practices

- **Build Cognitive Diversity** — Ensure decision-making bodies are diverse in experience, background, and perspective, plus there is a safe culture to voice different opinions and perspectives.
- **Leverage Data + Judgment** — Pair analytics with leadership intuition to balance evidence and experience.
- **Train for Agility** — Develop leaders’ capacity for critical thinking, scenario planning, and rapid response.
- **Foster Psychological Safety** — Create cultures where experimentation and learning from mistakes are encouraged.
- **Clarify Governance** — Establish transparent decision rights and accountability mechanisms to reduce delays.

Possible Research-Based Opportunities

Recently in 2025, a group of researchers—Yael Ecker, Anne I. Weitzel, and Joris Lammers—investigated people’s preferences for progress-oriented versus maintenance-oriented leaders across different situational contexts, including scenarios that demanded progress, maintenance, or protection. Across six preregistered experiments with 3,324 participants, the researchers simulated leadership scenarios and asked subjects which style of leadership they preferred.

Their findings revealed a systematic bias: participants consistently favored progress-oriented leaders, even in situations where a maintenance-oriented approach was more appropriate. For example, participants preferred progress-oriented leaders in political scenarios and team-based tasks, though they showed no strong preference when leaders advocated identical policies. The researchers further tested whether this bias was linked to perceptions of effort or broader goal scope. While perceived effort did not explain the bias, the perception of wider goal scope



reversed the preference pattern—participants then showed stronger support for maintenance-oriented leaders. This study demonstrates that people's leadership preferences are not always aligned with situational needs, creating potential blind spots in leader selection and decision-making. Bias toward progress-oriented leadership, while intuitive, can undermine collective outcomes when stability and maintenance are critical.

Call to Action: As you reflect on your leadership pipelines and succession strategies, ask: are you unconsciously favoring progress-oriented leaders at the expense of those who excel at maintaining systems, processes, and stability? Recognizing and balancing these biases may be essential to ensuring your organization has the right leaders for the right moments.

Conclusion

Enhancing leadership and organizational decision-making is not about eliminating uncertainty—it's about preparing leaders and systems to navigate it more effectively. Organizations that invest in decision-making capacity will unlock faster innovation, stronger resilience, and sustained competitive advantage.

References

Ecker, Yael, et al. "Bias toward Progress-Oriented Leaders: People Prefer Progress - over Maintenance-Oriented Leaders Even When a Maintenance Orientation Is Required." *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, vol. General, 1 Sept. 2025.