

# Bias in supervision

## a social psychological perspective on regulatory decision-making

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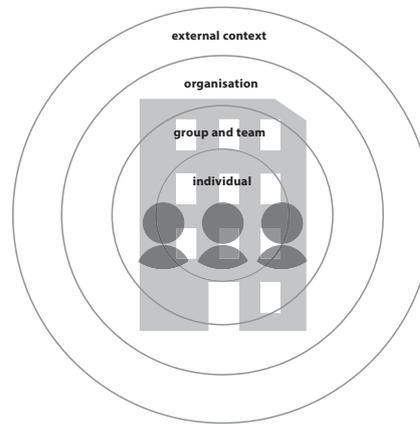
Doctoral dissertation - overview of the main findings

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### 1 Central research question

Supervisory bodies, such as market authorities and inspectorates, are expected to make decisions independently and objectively.

**To what extent are supervisory officers—who work at these institutions—able to make decisions in an objective and unbiased manner?** From a social psychological perspective, this dissertation provides more insight into the decision-making of supervisory officers at the individual, group, and organisational level; see Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A social psychological approach to examine regulatory decision-making at the individual, group, and organisational level

### 2 To what extent are supervisory officers aware of biases?

*individual level – online experiment*

- Supervisory officers ( $N_{\text{total}} = 339$ ) generally considered themselves to be rational and objective decision-makers, and demonstrated a *bias blind spot*; they believed that they were less biased than others.
- Those who were more *vigilant* (i.e., concerned about biases) showed a smaller bias blind spot.
- Simply *informing* supervisory officers about the risks of biases neither increased vigilance nor decreased the bias blind spot.

### 3 In what way are supervisory officers affected by biases?

*group level – field experiment*

- In a *group decision-making task* ( $N_{\text{groups}} = 47$ ), only a fifth of the groups reached the objectively best decision; most groups did not succeed in sharing and combining the information from each individual.
- Most groups were influenced by the initial majority preference, which indicates *group confirmation bias*.
- Using a discussion procedure did not lead to better decisions, but merely provided a *false sense of security*.

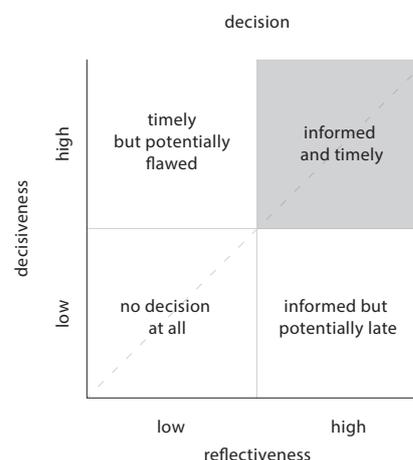
### 4 How can supervisory officers make informed and timely decisions?

*team/organisational level – questionnaires*

- Contrary to what is often believed, *reflectiveness* (e.g., taking steps to consider alternative strategies) was positively associated ( $N_{\text{total}} = 245$ ) with *decisiveness* (e.g., taking steps to reach decisions quickly); see Figure 2.
- At a team level ( $N_{\text{teams}} = 44$ ), higher levels of *participative leadership*—e.g., leaders actively ask for opposing views—was related to both more reflectiveness and decisiveness.

### 5 Conclusion

The empirical findings suggest that **even well-trained and experienced supervisory officers are 'only human' and are, therefore, affected by biases in decision-making.** Unfortunately, results indicate that informing supervisory officers about the risks of biases and providing a discussion procedure are ineffective strategies to correct for biases. On a positive note, the findings also suggest that reflectiveness and decisiveness go hand in hand with each other at the team level, and are not incompatible with each other. Moreover, **participative leaders can stimulate supervisory officers to act both reflectively and decisively.** These insights can help supervisory officers in taking a closer look at how they reach their decisions and taking the next steps in improving their decision-making. Supervisory bodies may then become more effective in making informed and timely decisions to prevent harm to society.



**Figure 2.** A reflectiveness-decisiveness model of joint decision-making