

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.

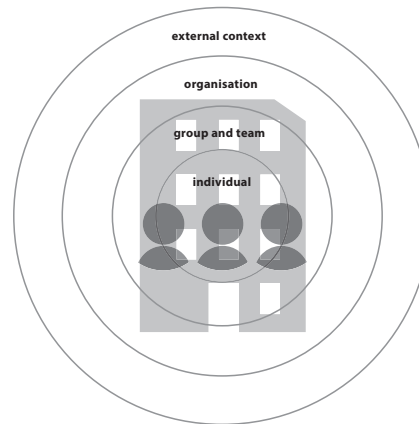


Figure 1. A social psychological approach to examine regulatory decision-making at the individual, group, and organisational level

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.

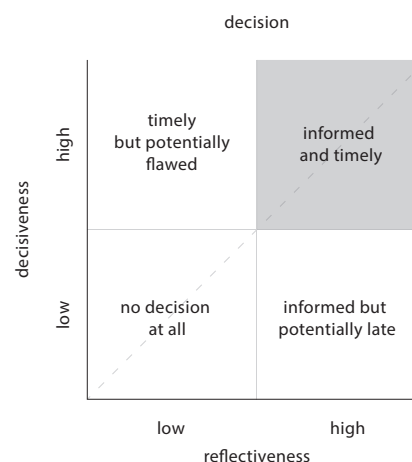


Figure 2. A reflectiveness-decisiveness model of joint decision-making