The Framing Effect: One of the Worst Cognitive Biases of them All


One of the most compelling and persistent cognitive biases that plague our decision making competence is the framing effect. You can experience this cognitive bias first hand by considering the following dilemmas.

Dilemma 1

The U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual disease, which is predicted to affect 600 people. You are to imagine that you have the authority to choose between two treatments.
Treatment A: You save 200 lives.
Treatment B: There is a 1/3 probability that 600 will be saved and a 2/3 probability that no one will be saved.

Which treatment do you choose?

Dilemma 2

The U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual disease, which is predicted to affect 600 people. You are to imagine that you have the authority to choose between two treatments.
Treatment A: 400 people will die.
Treatment B: There is a 2/3 probability that all 600 will die and a 1/3 probability that no one will die.

Which treatment do you choose?

If you were like most people – no matter how high your IQ – you were more likely to choose treatment A in Dilemma 1 and treatment B in Dilemma 2.
But this is irrational. You’ve been taken in the Framing Effect Bias. If you double check you can see that the numbers and probabilities in the two dilemmas are in fact identical; they are just verbally framed in different ways – Dilemma 1 in terms of lives saved, and Dilemma 2 in terms of lives lost.

According to the research, intelligence agents, who may in fact be in positions of authority to make life or death decisions like this, are more taken in by this bias than your average college student – more likely to take risks with human lives when outcomes are framed as losses rather than gains.

In general, a “framing effect” occurs when factually equivalent descriptions of a decision scenario lead to systematically different decisions depending on how they are phrased. In our example people react differently to a particular choice depending on whether it is described as a loss or as a gain.

**Examples of the Framing Effects In Real Life**

Framing effects in our day to day lives have been demonstrated by many studies.

- We are more likely to enjoy meat labeled 75% lean meat as opposed to 25% fat.
- 93% of PhD students registered early when the framing was in terms of a penalty fee for late registration, with only 67% registering early when the framing was in terms of a discount for earlier registration.
- More people will support an economic policy if the employment rate is emphasized than when the associated unemployment rates is highlighted.

Interestingly, framing effects may be neutralized in a second language!

**Cognitive Biases such as the Framing Effect can be Overcome**

Cognitive biases make us irrational. The benefits of a high IQ do not extend to coping with these biases. And coping with these biases is critical to being intelligent understood more broadly.

Cognitive biases like the framing effect can be to a large extent overcome with training.
Debiasing is a technique which aims to decrease biases by encouraging us to use our working memory and self-control to override automatic, ‘pop-up’ ‘System 1’ processing (Baumeister & Bushman, 2010, p. 155). Training working memory and increasing its capacity to engage System 2 thinking can help with debiasing.

So can building up useful ‘mind ware’. According to Professor Keith Stanovich from the University of Toronto who studies intelligence and rationality, ‘mind ware’ is made up of learned cognitive rules and strategies. It includes our ability to keep track of underlying probabilities when dealing with scenarios described in different but equivalent ways, how we go about doing Matrices IQ Tests, and our willingness to consider alternative hypotheses when trying to solve a problem.

IQ Mind ware’s ‘capacity strategy’ brain training method is based on training working memory capacity so we have the self-control and processing power to use System 2 logical thinking when we need to. It is also based on using problem-sets and tutorials to build up our ‘mind ware’ – our knowledge and strategies for better decision-making and problem solving, so we have the know-how to solve problems and make better decisions.

A high IQ alone is not enough to ensure good decision-making in real life. It helps, but we also need the self-control to snap us out of being cognitive misers and apply System 2 thinking when we need to. And we need the know-how and strategies to know how to apply our analytic minds to the problem at hand.

词汇

1. Cognitive 认知上的（和意识相关的）
   Cognition n 认知
   Cognitive bias 认知偏差。Bias 偏见
   由于固有观念，主观因素导致的，感知失真、判断不精准、解释不合逻辑、或各种统称“不理性”的结果。

2. Miser /ˈmaɪzər/ 吝啬鬼 miserly adj
   对钱吝啬。这里cognitive miser。认知上的吝啬鬼，不会花意识，精力去多用逻辑、理性思考。
3. Compelling 令人信服的，强大的
   Compel = force 强制
   Compelling = strong and forceful 令人信服的，强大的
   Compelling biases 令人信服的，强大到，让你感觉要去做的偏见

4. Persistent 持久稳固, 长期存在的。
   Persistent biases 长期存在的偏见
   形容物体：fight a persistent cold 和一个长期感冒/疾病做斗争
   形容人，固执，坚持不懈。 褒贬都可以。
   - 褒义词：He's very persistent in learning English
   - 贬义词：He called me again and again, so persistent

5. Plague /pleɪɡ/ n 瘟疫 麻烦。
   这里动词, cause constant trouble, illness. 持续制造麻烦。

6. Competence （做好事情的）能力，竞争力
   =ability
   Competent adj 有能力胜任的/ 做事高效的（efficient and effective）
   - 简历中，你要写，我非常擅长做某事，不要一直用
good at, do well in
   用
   /ɪk/ excel in, excel at (连读)
   She excels in managing people
   **Competent to do sth**
   She's competent to manage people

7. Irrational 非理性， 不合理的。not thinking clearly, unable to use reason or good judgement.
   Rational 理性， based on facts or reason, not on emotion or feelings.

8. intelligence agent 情报人员，特工
   Intelligence 智力，情报

9. Take in = trick or deceive 欺骗. 常用被动态
   打情骂俏的时候，别人问你和你对象当时怎么认识的，你可以说
   He's such a charmer who totally took me in.
   他当时就是凭着那张帅气的脸蛋，把我拐走了。
   charmer， 可爱，帅气的人，charm 有魅力的，吸引人的
10. **snap us out of being cognitive misers**

Snap sb out of = stop being in (condition, mood) 突然摆脱了某种状态，心情。

Snap 突然的声响，打响指， finger snapping, snap your finger.

Snapshot 截图，快照。

*snapshot*，图片社交，阅后即焚走红，让你大胆调情。国外在年轻人之间非常火的，15到23岁，快速拍照，视频分享，随性搞怪。

微信推出图片编辑功能，更新后，点击拍照，长按短视频，这个设计早在*snapchat*就有了。

**句子**

1）One of the most compelling and persistent cognitive biases that plague our decision making competence is the framing effect.

最令人信服、长期存在的认知偏差是框架效应，它会弱化我们正确决策的能力。

2）Don't plague me with stupid questions that could be answered by Google.

不要用那些能搜的到答案的问题来烦我。

3）According to the research, intelligence agents, who may in fact be in positions of authority to make life or death decisions like this, are more taken in by this bias than your average college student.

根据研究显示，情报人员（那些可能有像这样生杀大权的人），可能更容易被这种偏见所欺骗，相比于一般的大学生。

4）So we have the know - how to solve problems and make better decisions.

所以我们拥有了这种（独有的）信息-- 知道如何（通过了解认知偏差来）解决问题，如何更好做更好的决定。