
Reality of Human Decision-Making in the Digital Age: Leadership and Management Trending

Ademola, O. E.

Professor of Computer Science and Fellow of the Royal Society
American International University West Africa
College of Management and Information Technology
Kannifing, The Gambia
E-mail: ademolaeo@p-acc.co.uk

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, decision-making has transformed into a nuanced interplay of intuition, rationality, and technological influence. This paper examines the dynamics of human decision-making within leadership and management contexts, highlighting the increasing uncertainty and globalization of decision-making environments. It posits that while rationality continues to be a foundational element, intuitive and sometimes irrational choices are becoming more common due to the pressures of speed, automation, and strategic complexity. The paper frames decision-making as a critical arena for leadership and management, emphasizing emerging trends and challenges.

Keywords: Decision-Making, Leadership, Management, Intuition, Rationality, Digital Age, Strategic Choice

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a contemporary landscape characterized by swift technological progress, extensive global interconnectedness, and pervasive socio-political instability, the complexities and uncertainties associated with decision-making environments have grown markedly, prompting extensive inquiry both within academic circles and practical realms (Abell, 1991; Das, 2016; Hastie & Dawes, 2010; Plous, 1993; Stevenson, 2014). This uncertainty is no longer relegated to the margins; instead, it has become a central issue that affects not just strategic planning, but also operational execution and the ethical frameworks that guide leadership practices. Current research highlights that decision-makers across various sectors are increasingly compelled to navigate intricate, ambiguous, and high-stakes situations. These scenarios often involve a multitude of variables and unpredictable outcomes, requiring leaders to integrate not only robust analytical skills but also the capacity for adaptive foresight—an ability to anticipate and respond to emerging trends and challenges effectively. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for moral clarity, as leaders are tasked with making choices that can have profound implications for both their organizations and the broader society (Kahneman et al., 2021; Milkman, 2022).

The Intricate and dynamic interplay of various factors in today's world underscores the necessity for leaders to not only develop an agile mindset but also to actively foster a culture of innovation within their organizations. Equally important is the unwavering commitment to ethical principles as they navigate through the complexities of uncertainty. As leaders guide their teams through these turbulent waters, they must remain steadfast in their values while being responsive to the rapidly changing landscape. In recent years, global crises—including the escalating impact of climate change and mounting geopolitical tensions—have significantly transformed organizational priorities. As a result, leaders and managers are increasingly confronted with intense pressure to make decisions that transcend mere economic viability. They are now called upon to ensure that their choices are also socially responsible and environmentally sustainable. This evolution in leadership thinking reflects a broader societal consensus that effective strategic decision-making must intertwine ethical stewardship with active stakeholder engagement, fostering long-term resilience in organizational practices (George et al., 2021; Senge et al., 2020).

The current convergence of uncertainty and accountability has become a defining characteristic of contemporary leadership. This shift necessitates that leaders engage in a renewed exploration and analysis of cognitive biases that may affect their decisions, as well as the frameworks they use to guide their choices. Understanding these psychological factors is essential, as they play a crucial role in shaping outcomes. Furthermore, integrating core values into decision-making processes is vital for effective leadership in this era. This highlights the importance of leaders being reflective practitioners who recognize how their beliefs and ethics impact both their teams and the broader community (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2019; Gigerenzer, 2023).

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, decision-makers are confronted with the complexities brought about by advancing technologies and changing societal expectations. Navigating this multifaceted environment requires a careful balance between instinctive insights and analytical reasoning, both of which are vital for shaping strategic outcomes. This interplay between intuition and rationality not only challenges traditional decision-making frameworks but also compels academics and practitioners to reevaluate the very foundations upon which decisions are made, perceived, and executed (Sadler-Smith, 2023; Reyna, 2021). Recent advancements in cognitive science and behavioral economics highlight the necessity of integrating both data-driven analysis and intuitive judgment to enhance the effectiveness of decision-making. It has become increasingly evident that decision-makers should align these cognitive approaches with ethical principles, prioritizing long-term sustainability and resilience (Gigerenzer, 2023; Milkman, 2022). In this framework, leaders are not simply responsible for making choices based on statistical data or personal instincts; they must also take into account the broader implications of their actions for their organizations and communities.

Leaders must therefore develop a decision-making process that incorporates diverse modes of thinking, ensuring that their choices prioritize operational efficiency while also reflecting a commitment to social responsibility and moral judgment in the face of uncertainty and complexity (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2019; George et al., 2021). This evolving perspective underscores the importance of decision-making models that are not only adaptable and comprehensive but also firmly anchored in ethical considerations. By embracing this approach, leaders can create a more sustainable and socially conscious leadership ethos that effectively addresses contemporary challenges and promotes a more equitable future.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Decision-making is conceptualised in this study as a strategic leadership and management platform that transcends procedural execution. It is understood as a dynamic and integrative function that synthesises human cognition, emotional intelligence, and technological augmentation to navigate uncertainty and complexity in contemporary organisational contexts (Kahneman et al., 2021; Sadler-Smith, 2023). This framework positions decision-making not as a linear or mechanistic process, but as a multidimensional capability that reflects the evolving demands of leadership in a digitised, fast-paced world. At its core, the framework acknowledges that decisions—even those grounded in rigorous logic and data—can yield unexpected or paradoxical outcomes, due to the interplay of cognitive biases, emotional influences, and systemic unpredictability (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2019; Gigerenzer, 2023).

Leaders are thus required to cultivate adaptive intelligence, which includes the ability to interpret complex data, apply intuitive judgment, and respond ethically to emerging challenges (Reyna, 2021; Milkman, 2022). Furthermore, the integration of technological tools, such as artificial intelligence and predictive analytics, has redefined the boundaries of decision-making authority and accountability. These tools offer enhanced precision and speed, yet they also introduce new ethical dilemmas and require human oversight to ensure alignment with organisational values and societal expectations (George et al., 2021; Senge et al., 2020). The framework therefore emphasises the need for holistic decision-making models that balance efficiency with empathy, and strategic foresight with moral responsibility. In sum, this conceptualisation reflects a shift from traditional decision-making paradigms toward a leadership-centric model that is responsive, resilient, and ethically grounded. It provides a foundation for exploring how leaders can navigate ambiguity while fostering sustainable and socially attuned outcomes.

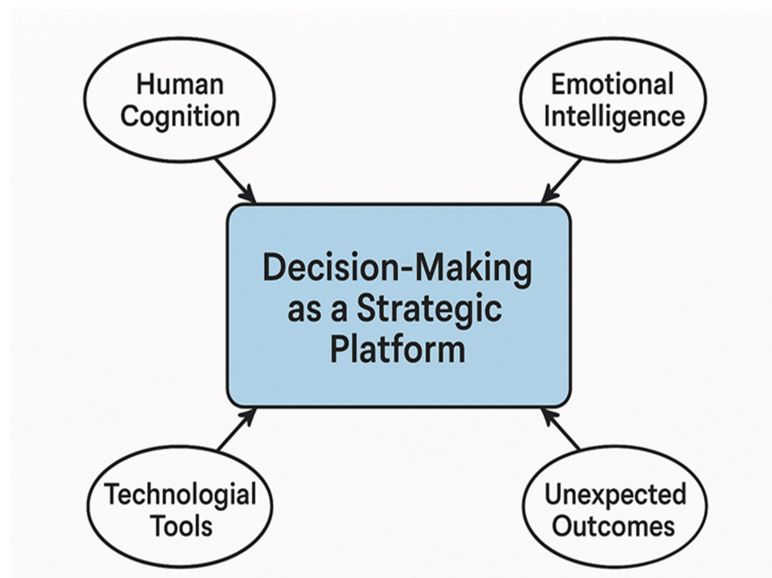


Fig 1: Decision-Making Conceptualised Framework

3. METHODOLOGY - LITERATURE SEARCH STRATEGY

This study conducts a structured literature review to investigate decision-making as a strategic platform for leadership and management. The methodology is crafted to synthesize contemporary academic insights regarding the interplay of human cognition, emotional intelligence, and technological enhancement within leadership contexts. By systematically reviewing peer-reviewed sources published from 2015 to 2025, the study seeks to develop a conceptual framework that captures the complexity, unpredictability, and ethical considerations of decision-making in fast-paced, digitized environments. This approach ensures methodological rigor while establishing a foundation for future empirical validation through mixed methods research.

Purpose and Scope

This study undertakes a systematic literature search to examine decision-making as a strategic foundation for effective leadership and management. The aim of this search is to identify peer-reviewed publications that investigate the integration of human cognition, emotional intelligence, and technological tools in leadership decision-making, particularly in rapidly evolving and digitized environments.

Search Databases

A curated selection of academic databases has been identified for their relevance to research in leadership, psychology, and management. These databases include Scopus, Web of Science, and APA PsycINFO, all of which offer comprehensive coverage of scholarly articles in these disciplines. Additionally, Business Source Complete has been included for its emphasis on business-related content. To enhance the research with grey literature, Google Scholar is also utilized.

Search Terms and Boolean Operators

A comprehensive approach to refining research on decision-making and leadership utilized specific keywords and Boolean operators. To examine the intersection of leadership and strategy, searches incorporated phrases such as “strategic decision-making” alongside “leadership.” The significance of emotional intelligence within management practices was thoroughly explored. Investigations into cognitive bias and human cognition in relation to organizational decision-making revealed the complexities at play. The influence of technological tools, particularly artificial intelligence, on decision-making processes was also a focal point. Finally, the exploration of unexpected outcomes in the context of leadership complexity highlighted the challenges leaders encounter when navigating dynamic environments. Search strings were meticulously crafted for each database to maximize relevance and comprehensiveness. The selection of articles adhered to distinct inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025 were considered, with an emphasis on studies pertaining to leadership, management, or organizational decision-making. All articles were required to be in English. The review included empirical studies, theoretical discussions, and review papers.

Exclusion Criteria

The emphasis is strictly on materials relevant to leadership and strategic decision-making. Publications that are outside this focus will not be considered, including non-English articles, editorials, opinion pieces, or any sources that lack rigorous peer review.

Screening and Selection Process

The initial search identified around 250 articles. Subsequently, titles and abstracts were evaluated for relevance, leading to a comprehensive review of 65 full texts. Ultimately, 30 high-quality sources were selected for synthesis, ensuring alignment with the conceptual framework and adhering to rigorous methodological standards.

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

A systematic matrix was employed to identify key themes concerning decision-making processes. The main areas of focus encompassed various decision-making models and frameworks, along with the impact of emotional and cognitive factors on these processes. Furthermore, the study investigated the incorporation of artificial intelligence and digital tools in leadership, emphasising their role in influencing decision-making. The research also considered ethical implications and unforeseen consequences that may emerge during the decision-making process. A thematic synthesis was conducted to uncover patterns, gaps, and new insights within the current literature, offering a thorough overview of these important subjects.

Strategic Choice and Digital Influence

Strategic decision-making in modern organizations increasingly relies on the seamless integration of both intuitive and rational approaches (Calabretta et al., 2017; Sloan, 2017). This shift is primarily driven by the ongoing digital transformation within business environments, which has markedly accelerated the speed at which decisions must be made. In this dynamic landscape, leaders confront the challenge of making timely and effective choices, frequently under pressure. In today's fast-paced business landscape, the need for rapid and effective decision-making has become increasingly critical. Organizations are striving to maintain their competitive edge in an environment characterized by an incessant flow of information and shifting market dynamics. As a result, leaders are increasingly turning to advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence as essential tools in their decision-making arsenals.

These technologies not only offer insightful interpretations of complex data sets but also empower leaders to make informed choices by analyzing massive volumes of information almost instantaneously. By leveraging real-time analytics, organizations can swiftly identify trends, opportunities, and potential risks, ensuring that they can respond to challenges and shifts in consumer behavior without delay. Moreover, the phenomenon of global interconnectivity significantly influences the decision-making landscape. Businesses today operate in an intricate web of international markets, which introduces a myriad of cultural, economic, and regulatory factors that must be considered. This interconnectedness not only broadens the scope of potential opportunities but also complicates the decision-making process, as leaders must navigate diverse stakeholder interests and varying market conditions across different regions (Ademola, 2017; Solari, 2012).

The Integration of advanced analytics with globalization has significantly changed the landscape of decision-making, making it more complex and nuanced. Today's leaders must be adaptable and well-informed, with a keen understanding of the global market's intricacies. A critical competency for these leaders is the ability to merge intuitive judgment with data-driven insights. This blend enables them to effectively navigate the challenges of contemporary decision-making. By striking a balance between experienced instincts and the empirical data offered by technological advancements, organizations can ensure that their strategic choices are both comprehensive and timely.

The Role of Intuition and Rationality

The conventional model of decision-making has long been anchored in the principles of rationality, emphasizing a structured approach grounded in thorough data analysis and logical reasoning. For many years, this methodology has dominated decision-making frameworks, prioritizing objective facts and quantifiable metrics over subjective experiences. However, in recent years, there has been a notable shift that highlights the increasing significance of intuition as a credible and essential component of the decision-making process.

This change recognizes the limitations of relying solely on rational thought, particularly in complex or unpredictable situations where numerous and interconnected variables can complicate analysis. In such cases, intuition emerges as a valuable asset, enabling decision-makers to quickly synthesize vast amounts of information and draw on past experiences, allowing for nuanced judgments when traditional methods may fall short.

By adopting a more holistic approach to decision-making—one that integrates both rational analysis and intuitive insight—organizations and individuals are better prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary challenges. This paradigm shift acknowledges that the intricacies of human experience and emotional intelligence can play a pivotal role in guiding effective decisions, fostering a more adaptable and empathetic approach to problem-solving (Julmi, 2019). In high-stakes environments such as emergency response, financial trading, or strategic leadership, decision-makers often face situations marked by incomplete data, ambiguity, or conflicting information. In these critical moments, the ability to harness one's intuition becomes exceedingly valuable. Intuition is informed by a wealth of past experiences, gut feelings, and contextual insights that, while not easily quantifiable, can nonetheless guide effective action (Inbar, Cone, & Gilovich, 2010).

To navigate these complexities successfully, leaders must cultivate a delicate balance between analytical rigor and experiential insight. This involves not only the effective use of data-driven strategies and evidence-based tools but also an appreciation for the significant role that instinctive judgment plays. Such judgment is refined through years of diverse experiences, enabling leaders to make decisions that, while not always explicitly backed by data, are grounded in a deep understanding of their environment. By integrating rigorous analysis with intuitive understanding, decision-makers can enhance their abilities in vital areas. This dual approach enables them to better assess risks, identify and seize emerging opportunities, and respond swiftly to rapidly evolving circumstances. Ultimately, this balanced strategy fosters a decision-making process that is not only more informed but also more effective, leading to improved outcomes in the face of uncertainty (Langley et al., 2015).

4. CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

The evolving landscape of decision-making presents a complex array of challenges that organizations must navigate. One of the most pressing issues is the inherent tension between the need for rapid decision-making and the critical requirement for accuracy. In an increasingly fast-paced environment, decision-makers often feel pressured to deliver swift outcomes, which can inadvertently lead to hasty conclusions that sacrifice thorough analysis. This urgency can result in missing vital information or overlooking potential consequences that more deliberate contemplation might have uncovered (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).

Moreover, the growing reliance on automation and advanced algorithms in the decision-making process raises significant concerns. While these technologies can enhance efficiency, they are not infallible. Algorithms can sometimes overlook important contextual nuances and subtleties that human judgment is better equipped to understand (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). As a result, there is a risk that decisions based solely on data-driven insights may lack the depth of understanding needed to address complex situations (Kahneman, Sibony, & Sunstein, 2021). In addition, the impact of globalization further complicates decision-making. Leaders must navigate the challenge of integrating diverse global perspectives into their strategies while also ensuring that decisions remain relevant and applicable to local contexts. This balancing act is crucial; decisions that are overly focused on a global viewpoint may disregard local needs and cultural implications, ultimately hindering their effectiveness (Ghemawat, 2018).

To address these multifaceted challenges, it is essential to reevaluate traditional approaches to leadership development and management training. Programs must place a stronger emphasis on cultivating key competencies such as cognitive flexibility, which allows leaders to adapt their thinking in the face of new information (Spiro et al., 2004), and emotional intelligence, which equips them to navigate interpersonal dynamics and understand the broader implications of their decisions (Goleman, 2006). Additionally, enhancing digital literacy among leaders is vital, as it enables them to understand and leverage the evolving technological tools that can assist in the decision-making process (Northouse, 2021).

Adopting a comprehensive strategy that emphasises speed and accuracy is essential to effectively managing the complexities of modern decision-making. This approach must integrate human judgment with technological advancements, ensuring global perspectives are applicable locally. By refining these critical skills, organisations can enable their leaders to adeptly navigate the challenges of today's decision-making landscape (Yukl, 2013).

5. LIMITATIONS

The methodology utilised for the literature search establishes a robust framework for exploring concepts; however, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that could impact the findings. A primary concern is the issue of database coverage bias. The search was limited to specific databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and APA PsycINFO, which are well-regarded within the research community. This restriction, while practical for ensuring a certain standard of quality and relevance, may inadvertently result in the omission of significant studies. Notably, there are numerous valuable research articles published in niche or regional journals that may not be indexed within these prominent databases. Such exclusions could potentially skew the results and limit the comprehensiveness of the literature synthesis. Therefore, it is crucial to consider this limitation when interpreting the findings and to explore additional avenues for research to capture a more inclusive view of the available literature.

Additionally, the temporal constraints of the inclusion criteria, which limited publications to those from 2015 to 2025, may lead to the exclusion of seminal works published prior that still hold significant theoretical importance. Furthermore, conceptual ambiguity arises from constructs such as emotional intelligence, cognitive bias, and technological augmentation, which can be interpreted differently across various disciplines.

This inconsistency may affect the comparability of findings. Another concern is publication bias, as peer-reviewed literature often favors studies with positive outcomes, potentially underrepresenting null findings or critical perspectives on decision-making frameworks. Language and accessibility issues are pivotal in ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives within leadership studies. Focusing exclusively on English-language publications risks sidelining a treasure trove of valuable insights that emerge from various cultural contexts and non-Western leadership paradigms. These paradigms often encompass distinct practices and philosophies that can greatly enhance global decision-making processes. It is vital to broaden our research scope to incorporate findings from publications in other languages, thus fostering a more inclusive understanding of leadership that captures a wide array of voices and experiences.

Moreover, while the proposed framework provides a theoretical synthesis of existing knowledge, it currently lacks empirical validation. This gap in practical testing underscores the necessity for further exploration of its applicability across various sectors, industries, and leadership styles. Conducting field studies or mixed-method research is crucial to effectively evaluating its performance and relevance in real-world scenarios. Such investigations would yield valuable insights into the implementation of the framework, revealing its strengths and weaknesses and ultimately enhancing its utility in informing leadership practices across diverse contexts.

6. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study characterises decision-making as a multifaceted strategic platform integral to leadership and management, intertwining human cognition, emotional intelligence, and technological progress. A comprehensive literature review establishes that contemporary decision-making is multidimensional rather than a linear process. This complexity is further compounded by unpredictability and ethical considerations (Kahneman et al., 2021; Sadler-Smith, 2023). The findings highlight the increasing significance of digital tools and underscore the necessity for leaders to cultivate adaptive intelligence to effectively navigate fast-evolving environments.

To deepen the understanding and validate the proposed conceptual framework, it is crucial to explore several key research avenues in greater detail. Firstly, engaging in empirical studies across a diverse range of organizational sectors—such as education, healthcare, and technology—will provide invaluable insights. These studies should focus on evaluating the framework's applicability within different contexts, allowing researchers to identify specific strengths and weaknesses. In the education sector, for instance, investigations could assess how the framework influences teaching methodologies and student learning outcomes. Similarly, in healthcare, researchers might explore its impact on patient care practices and operational efficiencies.

In the field of technology, analyzing the framework in relation to innovation processes and team dynamics can provide valuable insights. This type of cross-sector research enhances our understanding of the framework's significance and identifies opportunities for improvement. As a result, it can evolve and become more effective in practical applications. Exploring decision-making processes within diverse cultural contexts will undoubtedly reveal alternative perspectives that significantly enrich the framework with valuable global leadership insights. Moreover, integrating knowledge from cognitive neuroscience and behavioral economics will illuminate how leaders effectively navigate uncertainty and counter cognitive biases in their decision-making.

Investigating the ethical implications and accountability frameworks associated with AI-assisted decision-making in leadership is crucial. The integration of technology in this context necessitates a rigorous focus on ethical considerations to ensure responsible governance and decision-making outcomes. By examining these factors, we can establish robust guidelines that not only enhance effectiveness but also uphold moral accountability in AI applications within leadership roles. Given the complexity of this topic, future research should adopt a mixed methods approach that combines the richness of qualitative insights with the broad applicability of quantitative data. This dual strategy would allow researchers to explore leaders' lived experiences through interviews or case studies while simultaneously measuring decision-making outcomes through surveys or experimental designs. By integrating these findings, scholars can develop robust, context-sensitive models of strategic decision-making. To ensure methodological rigor and transparency in such studies, researchers may consult the Journal Article Reporting Standards for Mixed Methods (JARS–Mixed) provided by the American Psychological Association.

7. CONCLUSION

In the digital age, human decision-making has transformed into a multifaceted and dynamic process that presents exciting opportunities for leaders to blend intuition, rational analysis, and advanced technological tools. As our decision-making environments grow more complex—marked by extensive data, diverse stakeholder expectations, and swift technological advancements—there is a great potential for leadership to adapt and flourish, embracing these challenges as a pathway to success in navigating uncertainty. To adeptly manage this complexity, leaders must develop a mindset that not only accepts ambiguity but actively promotes a culture of innovation. This requires not only the encouragement of creative problem-solving and calculated risk-taking but also the establishment of frameworks that facilitate iterative experimentation. Such frameworks should prioritize adaptive learning, enabling teams to analyze failures constructively and leverage insights for continuous improvement. Moreover, harnessing cutting-edge technological solutions—like data analytics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence—can greatly improve the quality of decision-making. These tools allow leaders to sift through large datasets, spot trends, and forecast potential outcomes with greater precision, ultimately leading to more well-informed strategic choices. Leaders must decisively prioritize sustainable outcomes by aligning their decisions with long-term organizational objectives and societal responsibilities. This approach is essential; it guarantees that decision-making is not just effective in the short term but also cultivates enduring success and resilience in an ever-evolving landscape.

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