

Group Decision Making: Opportunities and challenges to policy making



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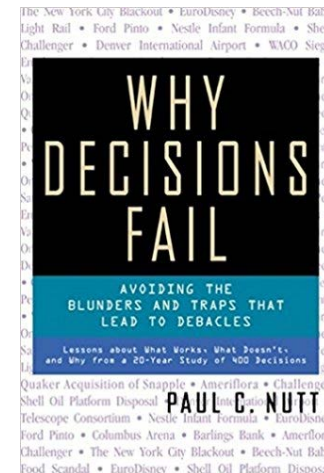
Policy problems

- Interconnectedness.
- Uncertainty.



Tackling policy problems

- Paul Nutt's 30-year research programme:
 - *persuasion* and *direction* are most frequently used decision making tactics....
 - ...NOT very successful though!



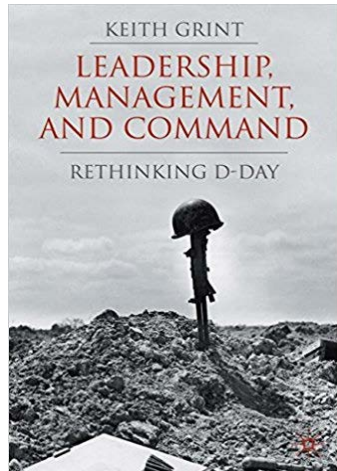
Tame problems

- Complicated but relatively well-defined.
- Have an expiry date.
- Likely to have occurred before.
- Leader's role is to **provide** the appropriate **solution**.

versus

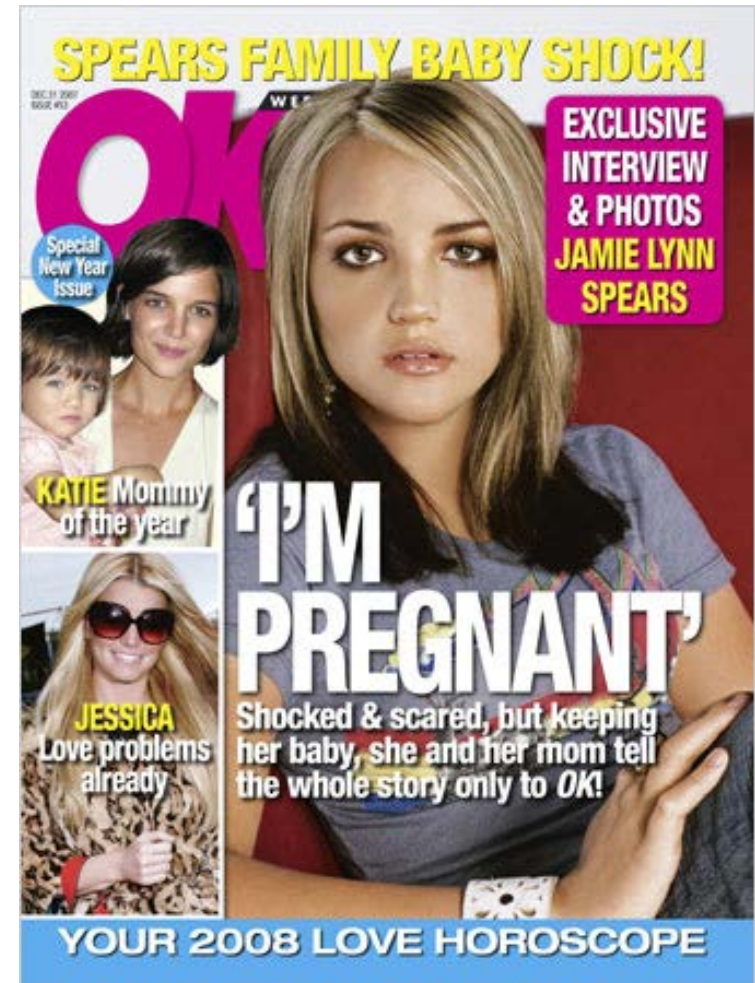
Policy problems

- Complex, ill-defined, and contested.
- No 'stopping' point
- No 'right' or 'wrong' answer.
- Leader's role is to **facilitate** a **problem-solving** collaboration.



Collaborative problem solving: An example

- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Group made up of representatives from the Borough, NHS, Education, Voluntary.
- Area has a disproportionately young population, with a much higher TPR than in other London boroughs.
- How to allocate limited resources to projects intended to alleviate issues associated with teenage pregnancy within the borough?



Challenges in group problem solving and decision making

- Orientation.
- Cognitive traps.
- Dysfunctional dynamics.



Challenges in group problem solving and decision making

- **Orientation.**
- Cognitive traps.
- Dysfunctional dynamics.



How do you evaluate decision quality?

- In terms of *process*?
- In terms of *outcome*?

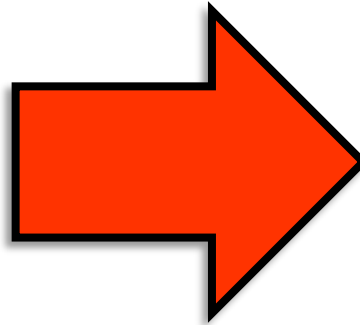


Process

versus

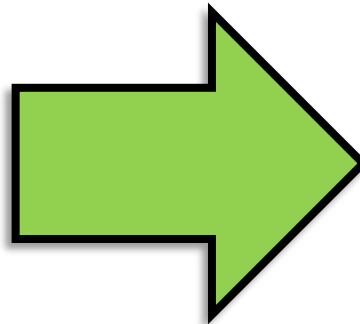
Outcomes

**Bad
Process**



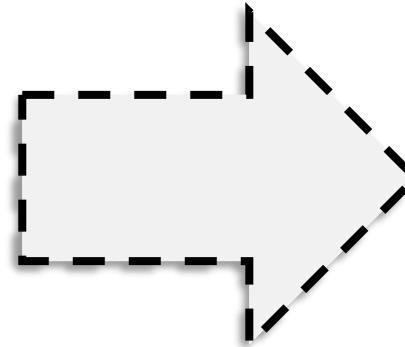
**Bad
Outcome**

**Good
Process**



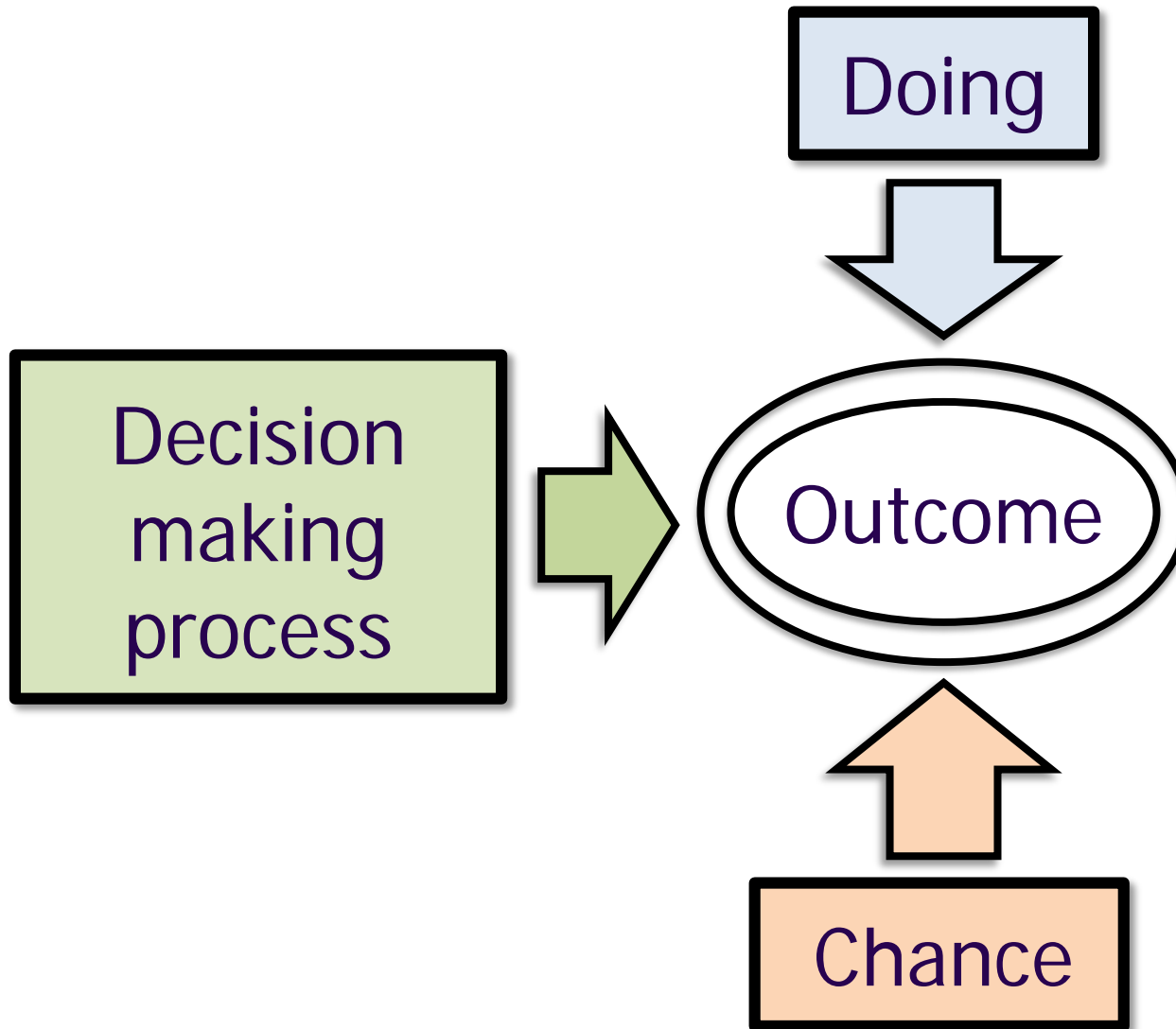
**Good
Outcome**

Good
Process



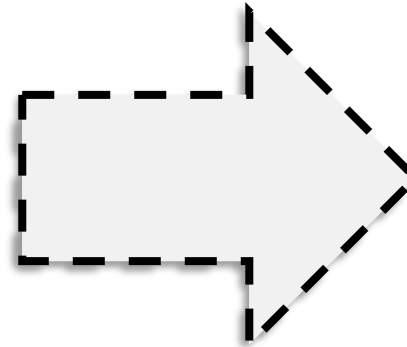
Good
Outcome

You can't control the outcome...



Adapted from source: Russo, J. E., & Schoemaker, P. J. H. (2002). *Winning Decisions: Getting it right the first time*. New York: Crown Business.

Good
Process



Good
Outcome

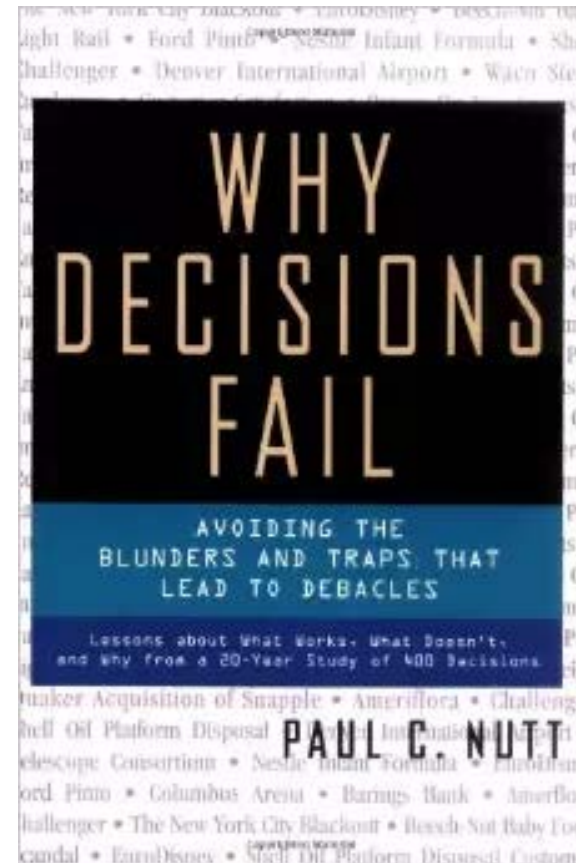
You can't control the outcome...

...but you **can** control the ***process***.

The closest we can guarantee decision outcomes is good decision processes.

Effective decision process

- Paul Nutt's 30-year research programme:
 - An effective (decision) process increases the chances of implementation success by 50%.



Challenges in group problem solving and decision making

- Orientation.
- **Cognitive traps.**
- Dysfunctional dynamics.



What's the point?

- Our 'claims' about **what** problems to solve, and **how** solve them, are all underpinned by our perceptions of what we see (or not see).
- What we see (or not see) depends on the **frames** we use.



Adapted from slide by Larry Phillips

Problem framing

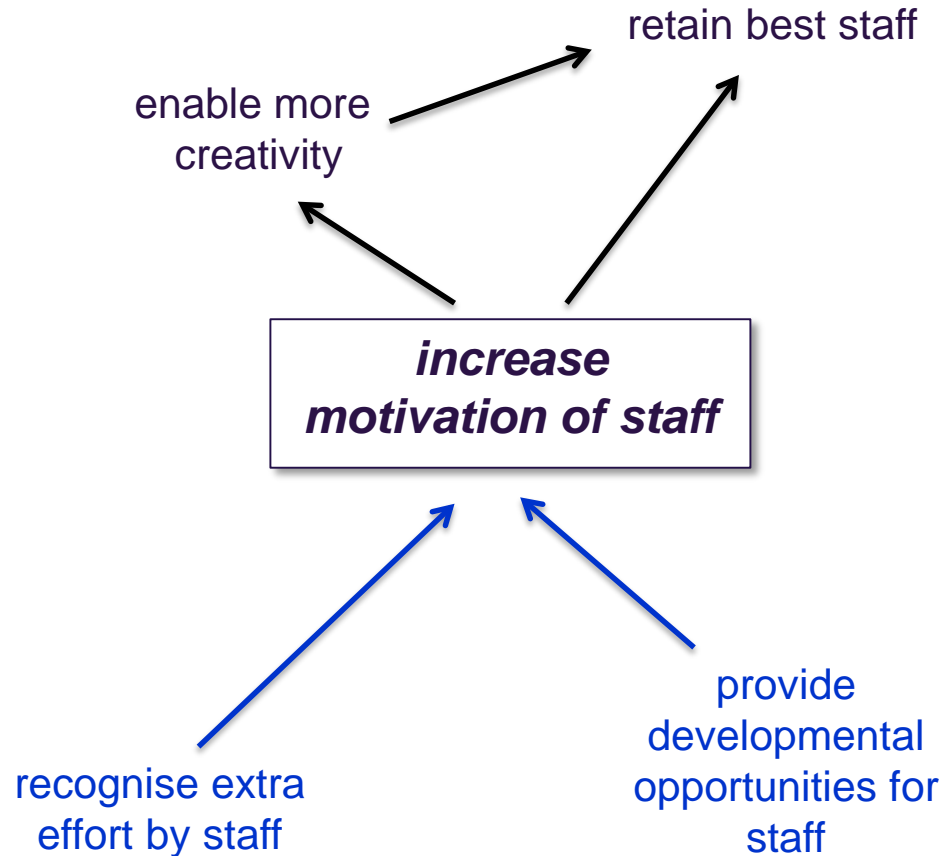
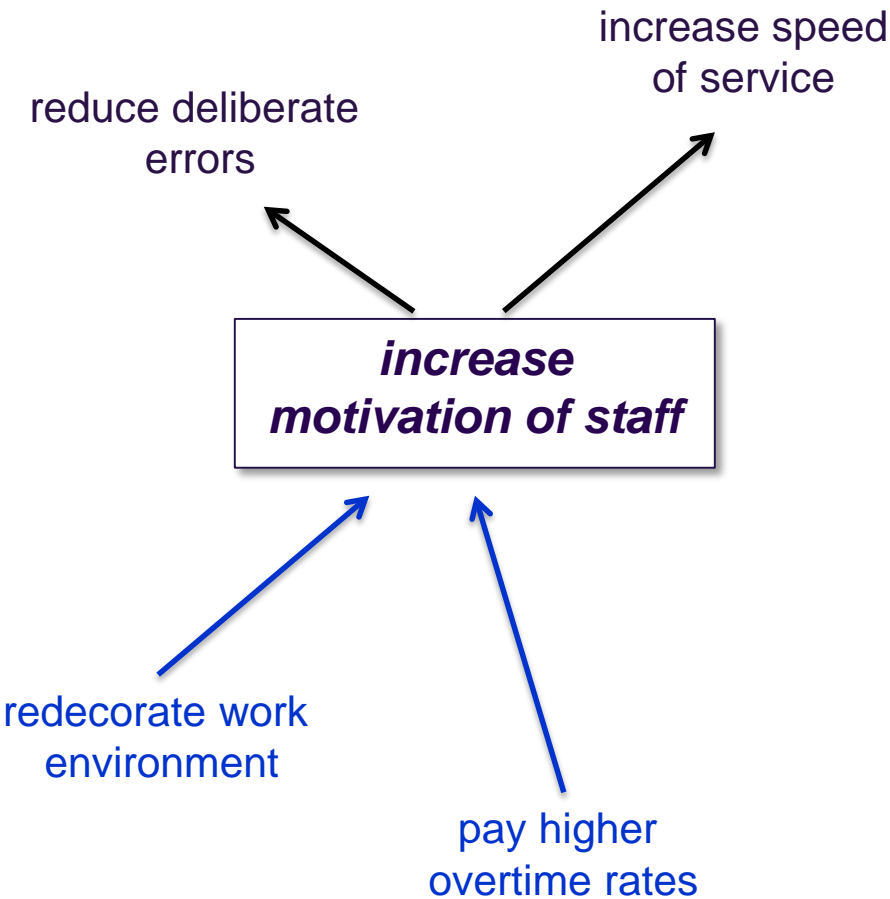
- Frames are mental structures that simplify and guide our understanding of reality.
- Frames force us to view the world (or a problem) in a particular, and limited, perspective.
- *Frames chosen influence what we see or expect to see, and thus guide future action.*



Source: Russo, J. E., & Schoemaker, P. J. H. 2002. *Winning Decisions: Getting it right the first time*. New York: Crown Business.

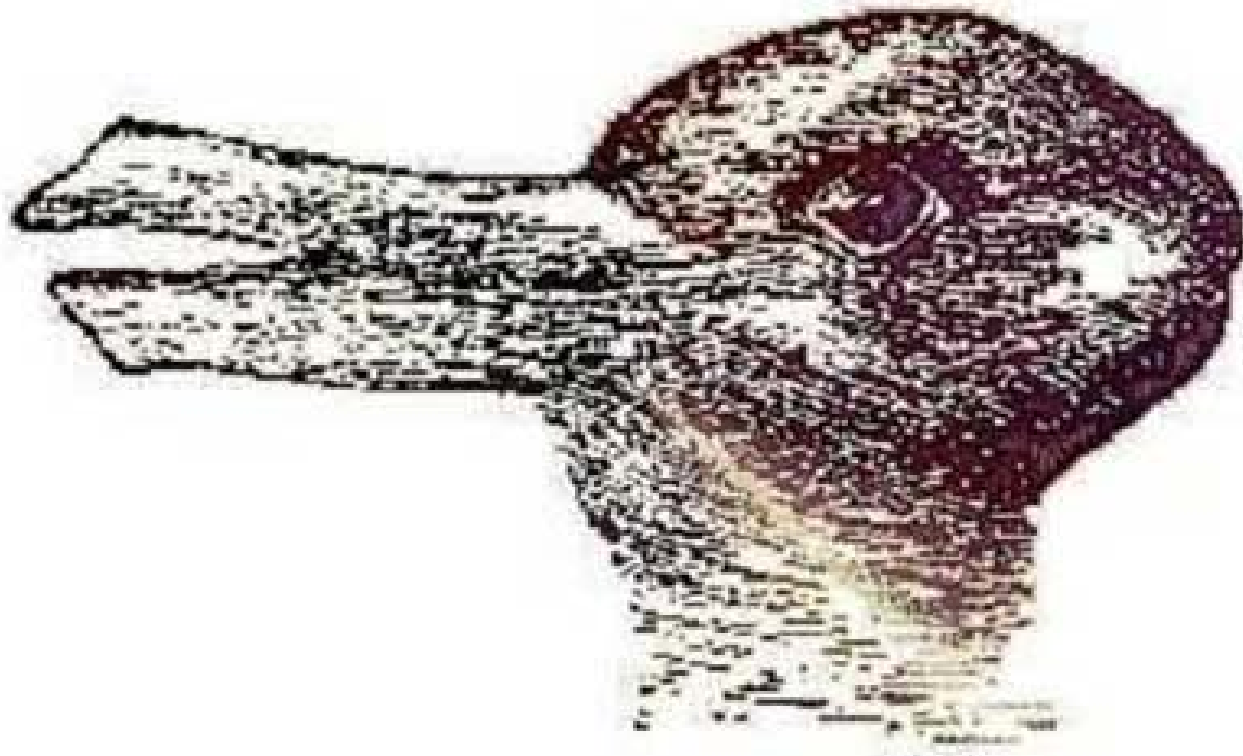
Person A

Person B



Source: Eden, C., & Ackermann, F. 1998. *Making strategy: The journey of strategic management*. London: Sage.

Kuhn's Duck-Rabbit





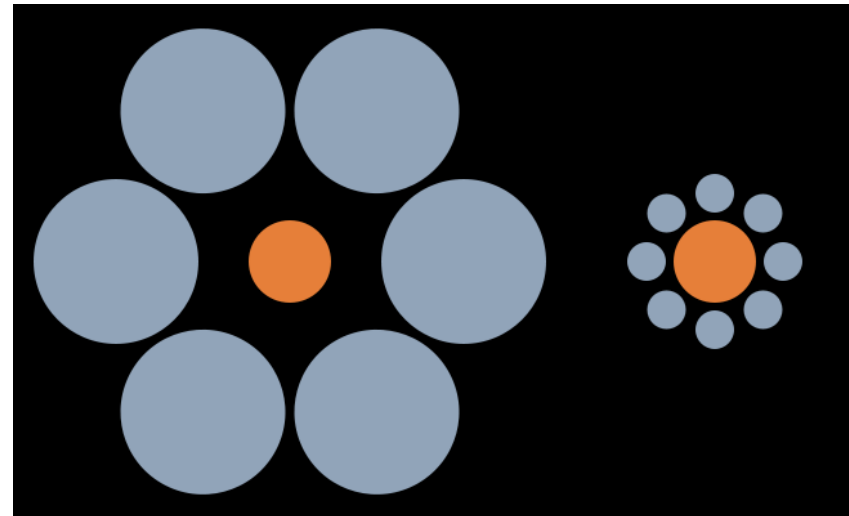
Slide by Colin Eden

Framing both a cognitive *and* a social process

- Giving meaning to what we see.
- Context matters!



- Give meaning to what others see.

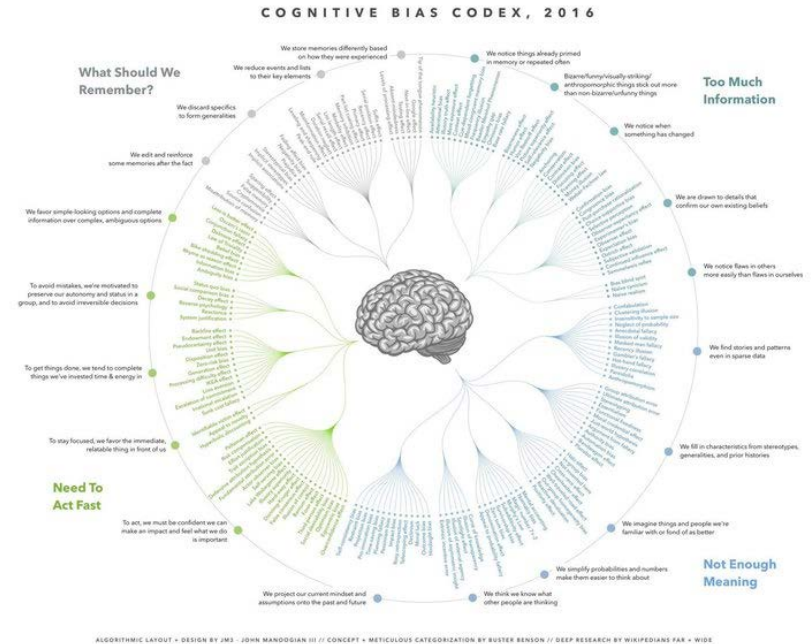


Framing in the Challenger Launch Decision



Cognitive traps

- Affects experts as well as novices, in a wide variety of professions.
- Common categories of biases:
 - Automatic associations.
 - Protection of the mind.
 - Cognitive style.
 - Faulty reasoning.
 - Social influences.

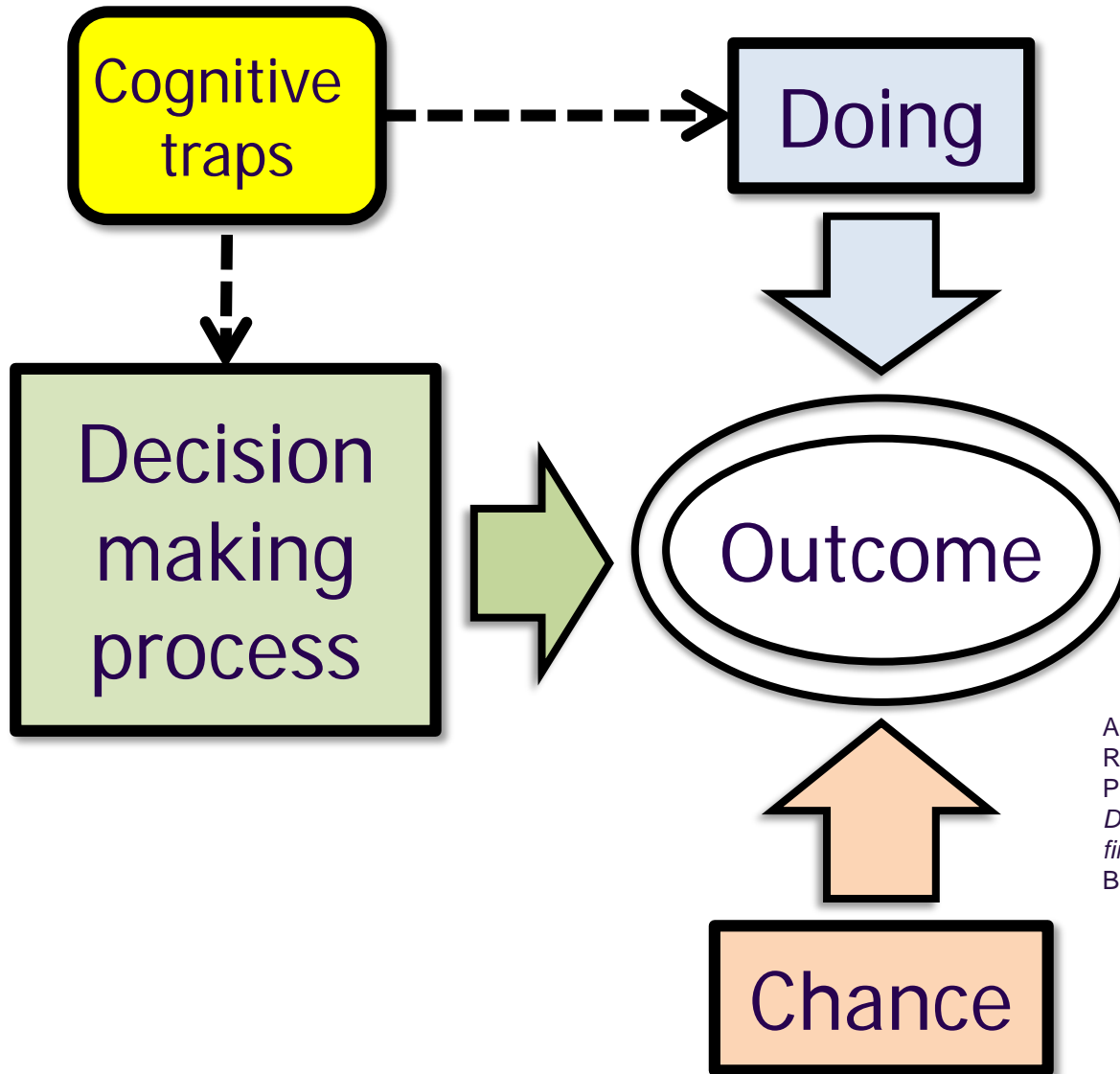


Sources:

Brockner, J. (1992). The escalation of commitment to a failing course of action – toward theoretical progress. *Academy of Management Review*, 17(1): 39-61.

Kahneman, D., Slovic, P., & Tversky, A. (Eds.). (1982). *Judgement under Uncertainty: heuristics and biases*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Murnighan, J. K., & Mowen, J. (2002). *The art of high stakes decision making: Tough calls in a speed-driven world*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.



Adapted from source:
Russo, J. E., & Schoemaker,
P. J. H. (2002). *Winning
Decisions: Getting it right the
first time*. New York: Crown
Business.

Challenges in group problem solving and decision making

- Orientation.
- Cognitive traps.
- **Dysfunctional dynamics.**



Dysfunctional team dynamics

- **Cognitive** conflict:
 - disagreements are about ideas/issues;
 - create tensions that are helpful.
- Cognitive conflict can evoke **creativity, sharpen ideas,** and **refine analyses.**



Source:

Eisenhardt, K., Kahwajy, J. L., & Bourgeois, L. J. I. (1997). Conflict and strategic choice: How top management teams disagree. *California Management Review*, 39(2): 42-62.

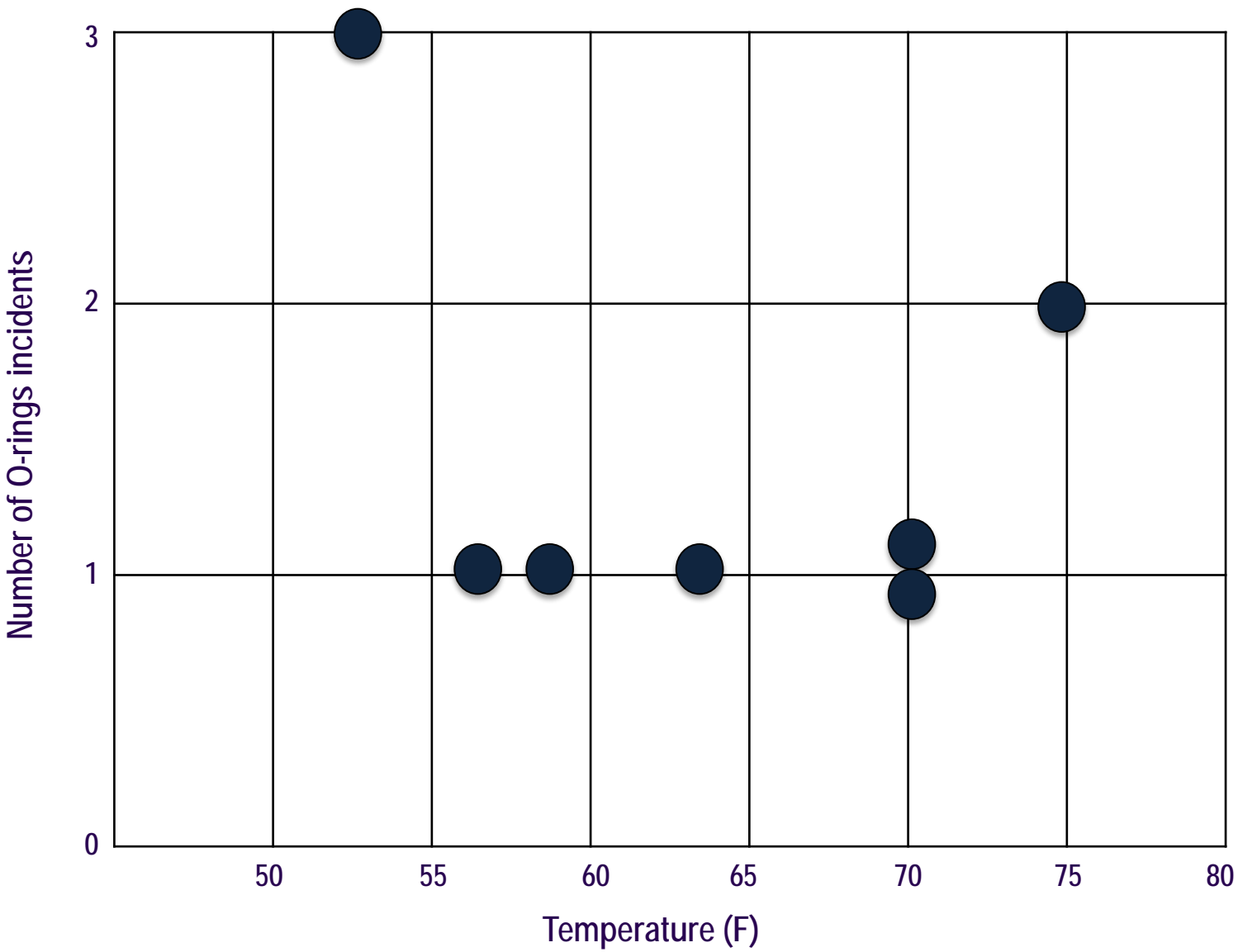
Dysfunctional team dynamics

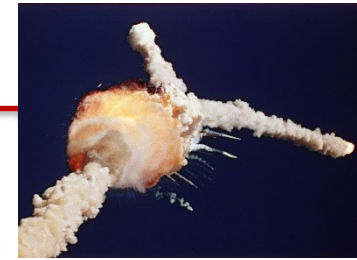
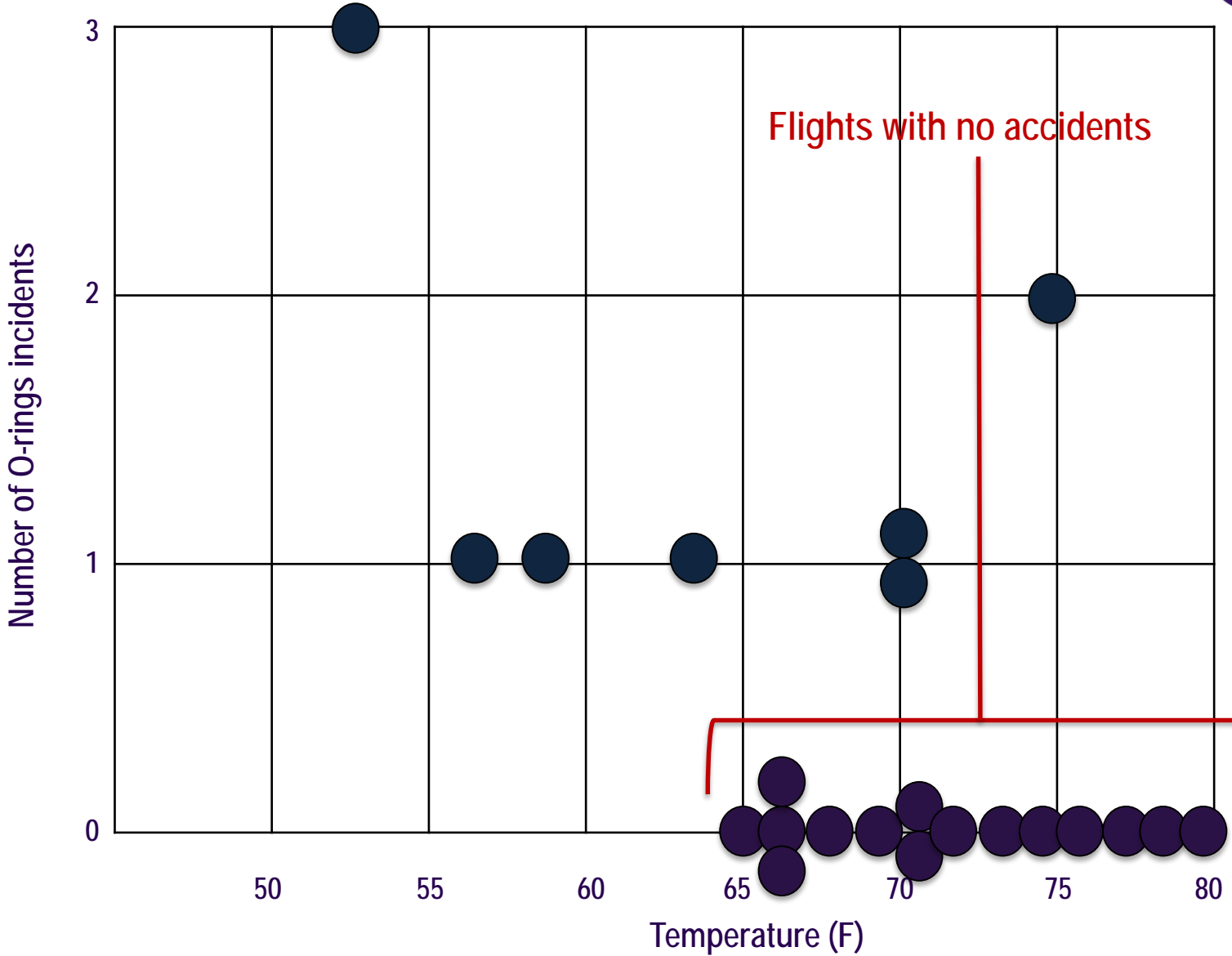
- **Affective** conflict:
 - disagreements descend into personal attacks;
 - people become defensive, closed to share more ideas, and likely counter attacks.
- Affective conflict can arise when:
 - limited, controversial and/or ambiguous data;
 - high stakes and uncertainty;
 - different values or beliefs;
 - different interests and incentives.



Source:

Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making... *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 39: 123: Academy of Management.





Opportunities for policy analysts

- Five important choices for supporting group decision making and/or group problem solving in a policy context:
 - **Debiasing** tools.
 - Team **membership**.
 - **Mode** of interaction.
 - Decision making **method**.
 - Degree of **management control**.



Adapted from source: Roberto, M. A. 2013. *Why great leaders don't take yes for an answer: Managing for conflict and consensus* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

ORS Webinar
CHOICES

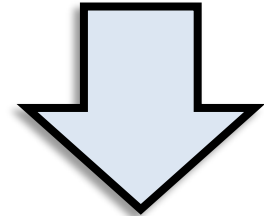
Debiasing



Cognitive traps



Doing



CHOICES

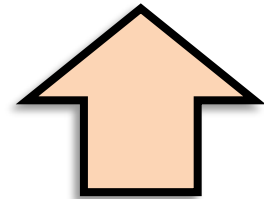
Membership
Mode
Method
Management



Decision making process



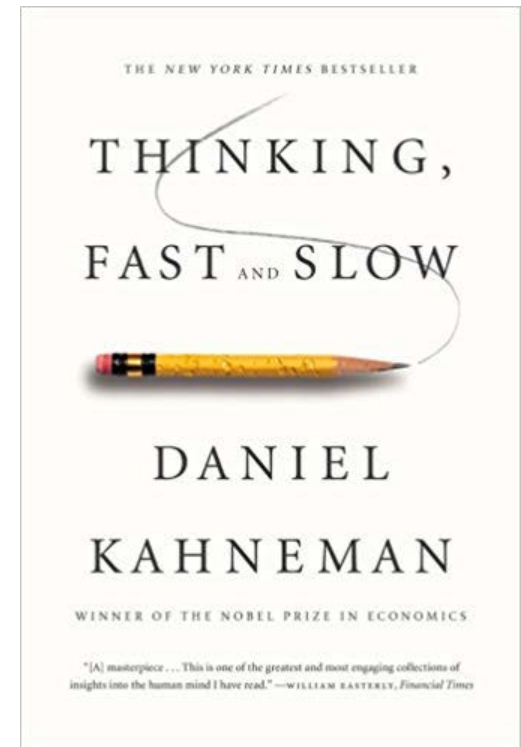
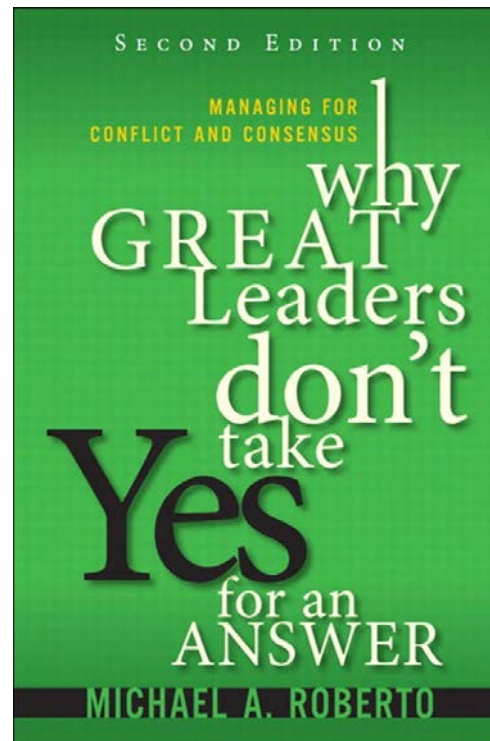
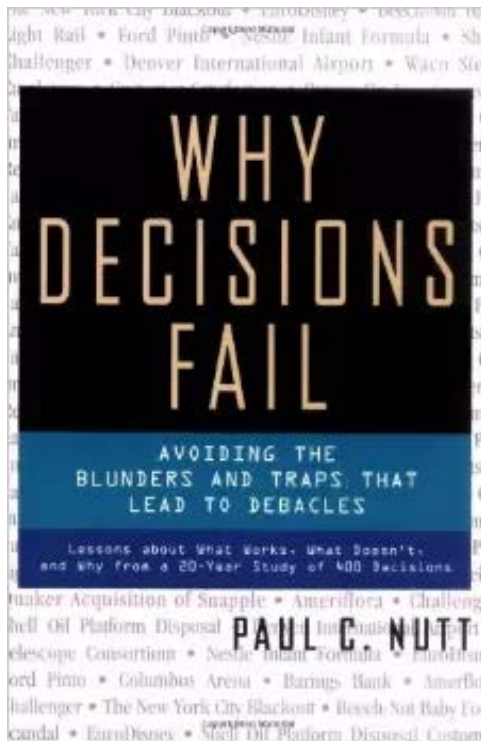
Outcome



Chance

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Further reading



Thank you!



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