

Decision-making and information processing under (radical) uncertainty – what do we know from social psychology and cognitive science perspectives and can how these insights be applied to the uncertainty of the migration context?

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Abstract

Research on judgment and decision making typically studies ‘small-worlds’—highly simplified and stylized tasks such as monetary gambles—among homogenous populations, rather than big real-life decisions made by people around the globe. These transformative life decisions—for instance, whether or not to emigrate or flee a country, disclose one’s sexual orientation, or get divorced — can shape lives. Here I will argue that rather than reducing such consequential decisions to fit ‘small world’ models, researchers need to analyze their real-world properties. Drawing on principles of bounded and ecological rationality, we propose a framework that identifies five dimensions of transformative life decisions: conflicting cues, change of self, uncertain experiential value, irreversibility, and risk. The framework also specifies simple, versatile choice strategies that address these dimensions by, for instance, breaking down a decision into steps, avoiding trade-offs between different selves, or sampling others’ experience. Finally, it suggests benchmarks for assessing the rationality of transformative life decisions.

Biography

Ralph Hertwig is a cognitive psychologist and behavioural decision scientists. He is the director of the Centre for Adaptive Rationality at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. His research examines models of bounded rationality such as simple heuristics, the importance of learning and decisions from experience, the measurement of risk preferences, and ways to change people’s behaviour for the better by boosting their cognitive and motivational competences in the online and offline world. His research regularly appears in journals such as Psychological Review, Behavioural and Brain Sciences, Psychological Bulletin Trends in Cognitive Science, Psychological Science, Nature Human Behaviour, and PNAS.