

Open Opening Lecture, 2nd Swedish Decision Making Network Meeting

PAUL SLOVIC

The More Who Die, the Less We Care

CONFRONTING THE DEADLY ARITHMETIC OF COMPASSION AND THE WORLD'S URGENT PROBLEMS

In order to prevent or mitigate present and future catastrophic losses of life, immense effort and technological sophistication are employed to assess and communicate the size and scope of potential or actual damages. This assumes that people can understand the resulting numbers and act appropriately. However, much psychological research casts doubt on this assumption. Large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling). We respond strongly to aid a single individual in need, but often ignore mass tragedies such as genocide or fail to take appropriate measures to reduce potential losses from natural disasters or emerging pandemic diseases. As the numbers grow larger, we become insensitive; the data fail to trigger the emotion or feeling necessary to motivate action. In some cases, large numbers convey a false sense of inefficacy, discouraging us from taking valuable actions we are capable of doing. Biases in decision making compound these problems, leading to actions that contradict our stated values toward protecting lives. Failure to understand how our minds become insensitive to catastrophic losses of life and failure to act on this knowledge increases the likelihood that we will not take appropriate actions to reduce the damages from catastrophic events associated with poverty, disease, climate disasters, genocide, and nuclear war.



Paul Slovic is Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon. He studies human judgment, decision making, and risk analysis. In particular: how to describe risk perceptions and measure their impacts on individuals and society.

Monday, October 14, 2024, 10:00 - 11:30, LUX:C116 (Aula)

The **Swedish Decision Making Network** fosters collaboration between Sweden-based scholars interested in research on Judgement and Decision Making. The 2nd meeting of the network takes place on October 14-15, 2024 at Lund University.

Inquiries/questions? Please contact Anton Wrisberg at anton.wrisberg@lucs.lu.se.



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