

The Environmental Decision Task: A new behavioral paradigm for studying the money-environment trade-off

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Oral presentation

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Author

Frederik De Spiegeleer

Affiliation

Ghent University

Abstract

Whether or not people make pro-environmental decisions often depends on the extent to which personal consequences outweigh environmental consequences. Recently, some decision tasks have been introduced to study pro-environmental decision-making when there is a trade-off between environmental and individual consequences (e.g., money-environment trade-off). These tasks make it possible to study pro-environmental decision-making in controlled lab settings. The main goal of the current set of studies was to develop a new, intuitive, easy-to-perform, and easy-to-conduct task to study the money-environment trade-off.

In the Environmental Decision Task (EDT), participants decide whether to receive money or invest it in the fight against climate change. Three studies ($N = 1,294$) were conducted to validate the EDT by analyzing its relationship with self-reported pro-environmental and pro-self propensities, revealing weak to moderate correlations that support the task's ability to capture relevant trade-offs. Additionally, social desirability did not substantially relate to the decision-making in the task, and open-ended responses supported that participants' choices aligned with the task's intended purpose. While we have examined EDT with many trials (up to 48) and consequential choices, we demonstrate that just nine hypothetical trials are sufficient to reliably examine decision-making under the money-environment trade-off. This makes the paradigm particularly suitable for short (online) studies.

In the presentation, we will discuss how such tasks can be used as dependent variables when presenting participants with different conditions, allowing us to systematically investigate how contextual factors influence decision-making processes. We will also use this example of the study to explain how these behavioral tasks can be used to extract different latent factors considering people's decision tendencies when confronted with different trade-offs and how they relate to many different categories of consumption behavior. Furthermore, we will delve deeper into the importance of examining qualitative data to better understand the strategies people actually use when making decisions in such tasks.

Keywords

Pro-environmental decision-making, Trade-Offs, Behavioral Tasks

Primary author: DE SPIEGELEER, Frederik (Ghent University)

Co-authors: Prof. WEIJTERS, Bert (Ghent University); Prof. MILLET, Kobe (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

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