

Frame-based guide to situated decision-making on climate change

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The present paper provides an overview of a frame-based approach to situated decision-making on climate change. More particularly, it will explain how decision-making may gain from making frames more explicit. Frames are background concepts that shape in a “hidden” and taken-for-granted way how social actors interact with other actors and take shared or opposing positions regarding an issue. Science-related issues, such as climate change, are often linked to a few frames that consistently appear across different policy areas. For instance, Al Gore’s movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, reflects holistic and moral thinking about climate change, calling for precaution in the face of potentially catastrophic impacts. Other frames may reflect a more analytical approach that highlights specific interpretations of scientific uncertainty. For example, some discussions about climate change may frame the problem as: “How can we reduce uncertainty in our estimates of future climatic conditions and how climate change will impact us?” In contrast, other discussions may focus on: “Given that there is considerable uncertainty about our future, how can we best manage this coastal area to reduce risk and increase system resilience?” These contrasting frames are directly relevant for identifying the main uncertainties that should be taken into account in developing a decision strategy. Thompson’s two basic dimensions of decision are extremely relevant here. The first dimension refers to beliefs about the cause/effect relations that are instrumental for what the decision might actually accomplish; the second refers to preferences regarding the possible outcomes of the decision. Depending on the specifics of the situation, there can be certainty or uncertainty regarding causation and certainty or uncertainty regarding outcome preferences. Based on these uncertainties, four types of decision strategy can be characterized, focusing on (1) a computational strategy, (2) a compromise strategy, (3) a judgmental strategy, or (4) an inspiration strategy. The paper elaborates each strategy to find the most appropriate methods and tools, as well as the most appropriate social structure for the strategy.