



FRIDAY, APR. 19

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“The Adversarial Mindset”

Many social outcomes are reached by means of competitions between opposing actors. While the positive effects of competition are beyond dispute, this paper contends that competitive situations also trigger a particular psychological mindset that can distort contestants’ judgment and lead to suboptimal courses of action. The paper presents a theoretical framework that consists of a myside bias, by which people adopt a self-serving view of the competition, evaluate themselves favorably, and evaluate their counterpart unfavorably. The framework also proposes the construct of otherside bias, by which people impute to their counterparts the same distortions that they display. The combined effect of these biases is bound to fuel conflict-promoting behavior. Next, the paper presents two experiments designed to test the framework. Using minimalistic experimental treatments, we find that participants display the myside and otherside biases.

The first objective of this paper is to offer a comprehensive account of the psychological mindset evoked by competitive situations. We seek to integrate an array of findings established across a variety of fields of research into a unifying theoretical framework and to demonstrate their joint impact on this important domain of human judgment and behavior. Second, this project offers coherence-based reasoning as the cognitive foundation for the framework, in that the array of judgments are intricately interconnected and organized in a coherence maximizing representational structure. The richness of the experimental materials enables the extension of the coherence effect across a number of dimensions both within and between the myside and otherside biases.

SHORT BIO

Dan Simon is the Richard L. and Maria B. Crutcher Professor of Law and Psychology at the Gould School of Law and has a secondary appointment at the Department of Psychology, both at the University of Southern California. Simon specializes in the field of Law & Psychology, and has published widely in both legal and experimental psychological journals.

Simon has been a visiting professor at Yale Law School and Harvard Law School. Before joining the University of Southern California, he was a faculty member of the Law School at the University of Haifa, in Israel. He earned an S.J.D. degree from Harvard Law School, an MBA from INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France, and an LL.B. from Tel Aviv University. Prior to joining academia, he worked as an attorney for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

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