

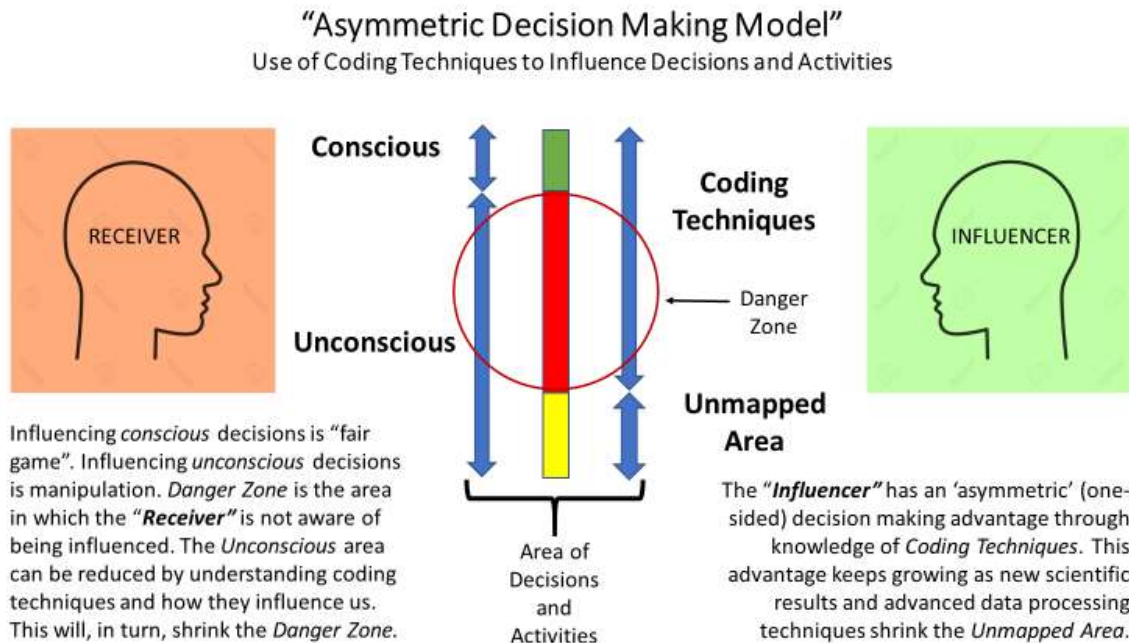
WHITE PAPER Asymmetric Decision Making

It's estimated that each of us makes about 35,000 decisions, *each day*. To make this many conscious decisions every day is clearly beyond the capacity of even the cleverest of us. To manage, our brains cope by using clever rules of thumb and short cuts. Rules of thumb are what we call "heuristics" in jargon. Short cuts are usually summarized as "cognitive biases". Together they allow our brains to deal with most decisions subconsciously, without the effort of rational thinking.

Not spending the energy on making rational decisions does not, however, mean that those decisions are irrational. We are not making random decisions. There are influencing factors at play: our biases. They drive our decisions in a systematic way, in certain directions. While we are not making rational decisions, our decisions are *predictively irrational*. Those who understand how our biases drive decisions are able to predict and influence those decisions. When it comes to you, it can you - or someone else.

Most people are not even aware of the existence of these biases, let alone understand how they influence our decisions. But it is all common knowledge in the world of marketers, PR specialists and political 'spin doctors'. They understand how you make decisions, what your trigger points are, what distortion (biases) you have and how they influence you. All the things you are unlikely to be aware of. They know more about you than you do yourself. So when it comes to understanding and influencing your decision making process there is a clear asymmetry between you and them. And it is *not* in your favour. Now, *that* is a scary thought...

The picture below summarizes this asymmetric situation. You, as the 'receiver' of an external message filter it through both your conscious and unconscious brain. But you are only aware of what goes on in the conscious domain. The other party, the 'influencer' may be aware of both your conscious and unconscious decision influencers. The area he is aware of, but you are not, is your 'danger zone'. Operating in this zone the influencer can take advantage of his 'asymmetric decision making advantage' and influence you without your being aware of it.



As you can see on the picture, there is also an area that neither you, nor the influencer understands. This 'unmapped' area under constant study by neuro-experts. It is shrinking fast. What do you want to bet that your influencer will learn about new developments in this area before you do? And as that shrinking happens, your 'danger zone' gets bigger and bigger - unless you do something about it.

The good news is that you *can* do something about it. Being aware of how you make decisions is a good first step. Knowing that your 'danger zone' exists is essential. It helps if you learn about the many biases that influence you (and, fear not, every single one of the other 7 billion people on the planet). Eliminating your own biases is near impossible - even if you recognize their existence, which most people do not. And you should not try to eliminate them anyway. Could you rationally deal with 35,000 decision per day?

What we need to do is to realize when a decision is important, impactful, with serious long term consequences. When we cannot afford to be influenced by the asymmetric power of the other party. Those are the occasions for which we have to build our defenses against asymmetric influencing by others. This requires an evaluation framework for your decisions to quickly decide if 'rational' consideration is needed. How to do that is another topic - and at CodeBreakers we have built tools to do just that.

You may, at this point, ask: "Why all this interest, all of a sudden, in these influencing techniques? Has it not always been the case that people tried to convince and influence each other, using whatever means they had? What is new now?" Of course, you are right - influencing is as old as humanity itself. But a number of things did change.

There have been incredible advances in our understanding of how the human brain works and using those psychological learnings in business. We also have the advanced technology to apply those same learnings to billions of people at the same time. And we have new, emerging technologies, shrinking the 'unmapped area' of our decision making. That will give more and more power to those who understand, and can use, the knowledge and the tools of coding, biases, cognitive techniques. Given a choice, you probably want to be among the latter.