



# The science of boardroom decision-making

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How neuroscience shapes judgment — and how boards can use it



# With you today...



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# The hidden challenges of boardroom decision-making

## **Boards today operate within uniquely demanding circumstances**

- High-stakes, limited-information environment
- Non-hierarchical governance structure
- Intense stakeholder scrutiny



## **Why traditional approaches can miss human factors**

- Emotion
- Bias
- Attention limits
- Social dynamics

**These shape judgment in the moment**



Neuroscience helps boards sharpen oversight, reduce blind spots, and enhance decision quality.





# The neuroscience behind decision-making

## The attention economy of the brain

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- Attention is scarce; what boards focus on drives decisions
- Simplicity and clarity improve cognitive performance
- Group attention naturally converges



## The tyranny of too much information

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- The brain has limits; overload degrades judgment
- More data doesn't mean better decisions
- When overwhelmed, we default to shortcuts and bias



## The social brain, synchrony, and perspective-taking

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- We are wired for social connection and empathy
- Synchrony strengthens trust and group performance
- Perspective-taking expands collective intelligence





# Polling Question



**You've heard the situation and the options presented by the CEO. What path should the company take?**

- A** Option 1 – **Controlled Pause:** Hold in place. Limit communications to a neutral update while standing up an internal tracker for situational awareness.
- B** Option 2 – **Help First, Facts Later:** Move quickly to announce relief and resources. Share limited facts publicly but provide slightly more internal guidance.
- C** Option 3 – **Lean in Hard:** Proactively correct the public narrative with external validators, community voices, and active engagement, including with critics.
- D** Option 4 – **Independent Inquiry First:** Commission a third-party investigation and pause all public-facing statements until you have external validation.
- E** Option 5 – **Reset the Leadership Table:** Announce a board-led response including direct oversight, a leadership restructuring, or interim CEO support.



# From insight to action—applying neuroscience

## 1

### Power of Pause

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- **2-minute pause before votes:**  
“What problem are we solving?  
What assumptions?”
- **Use a premortem:**  
“Imagine it failed — what happened?”

## 2

### Power of Focus

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- **Put hardest items early**
- **Separate ‘decision’ from ‘discussion’**
- **Curate materials into:**
  - decisions
  - trade-offs
  - open questions

## 3

### Power of Empathy

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- **Lead with curiosity; invite dissent**
- **Label emotions to lower the heat**
- **Reframe debates:**
  - stakeholder lens / opposite view

# Thank you!

**Download:**

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