

## Perceptions of Indecisiveness in the Workplace Nicholas Howald & Margaret Brooks Bowling Green State University

### ABSTRACT

This study investigated perceptions of workplace indecisiveness. Participants made a hypothetical promotion decision after reading a vignette about an employee's workplace (in)decisiveness and decision behavior in a two (trait decisiveness) x two (situational decisiveness) x two (decision outcome) between-subjects design. Decisive decision-makers with positive decision outcomes were more promotable than indecisive decision-makers with positive decision outcomes. Trait (situational) decisiveness attenuated the negative effects of situational (trait) indecisiveness.

### INTRODUCTION

Indecisiveness is often seen as an undesirable trait in a manager (Brooks, 2011), while decisiveness is valued (Deery & Jago, 2001). Research has linked indecisiveness to other undesirable managerial traits (Bacanli, 2006).

However, research has shown that the appearance of indecisiveness may be indicative of other individual differences (Chun Chu & Choi, 2005). Furthermore, indecisive people exhibit search patterns which are generally more cautious (Ferrari & Dovidio, 2000) – an attribute which may be advantageous in some professions.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Research Question 1:** How are indecisive and decisive people perceived when they achieve similar outcomes?

**Research Question 2:** How are trait indecisive and decisive people perceived when they act counter to their trait disposition?

### METHOD

#### Participants:

- Amazon Mechanical Turk workers ( $n = 248$ )
- Average age 34 years
- Participants 63% male, 74% White

#### Design:

- 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental design
- Participants made a hypothetical promotion decision after reading about the employee's trait disposition (indecisive or decisive), decision making process (indecisive or decisive), and outcome of their decision (a gain or loss for the company).

### DISCUSSION

#### Research Question 1:

Three-way ANOVA were conducted for all analyses. The promotability of decisive candidates compared to indecisive candidates was significantly higher when a positive outcome was achieved than when a negative outcome was achieved,  $F(1, 240) = 7.60, p < .01$ .

When candidates achieve a negative outcome, they are rated low on promotability, regardless of decision making style. However, when outcome is positive, decisive candidates are rated as more promotable than indecisive candidates.

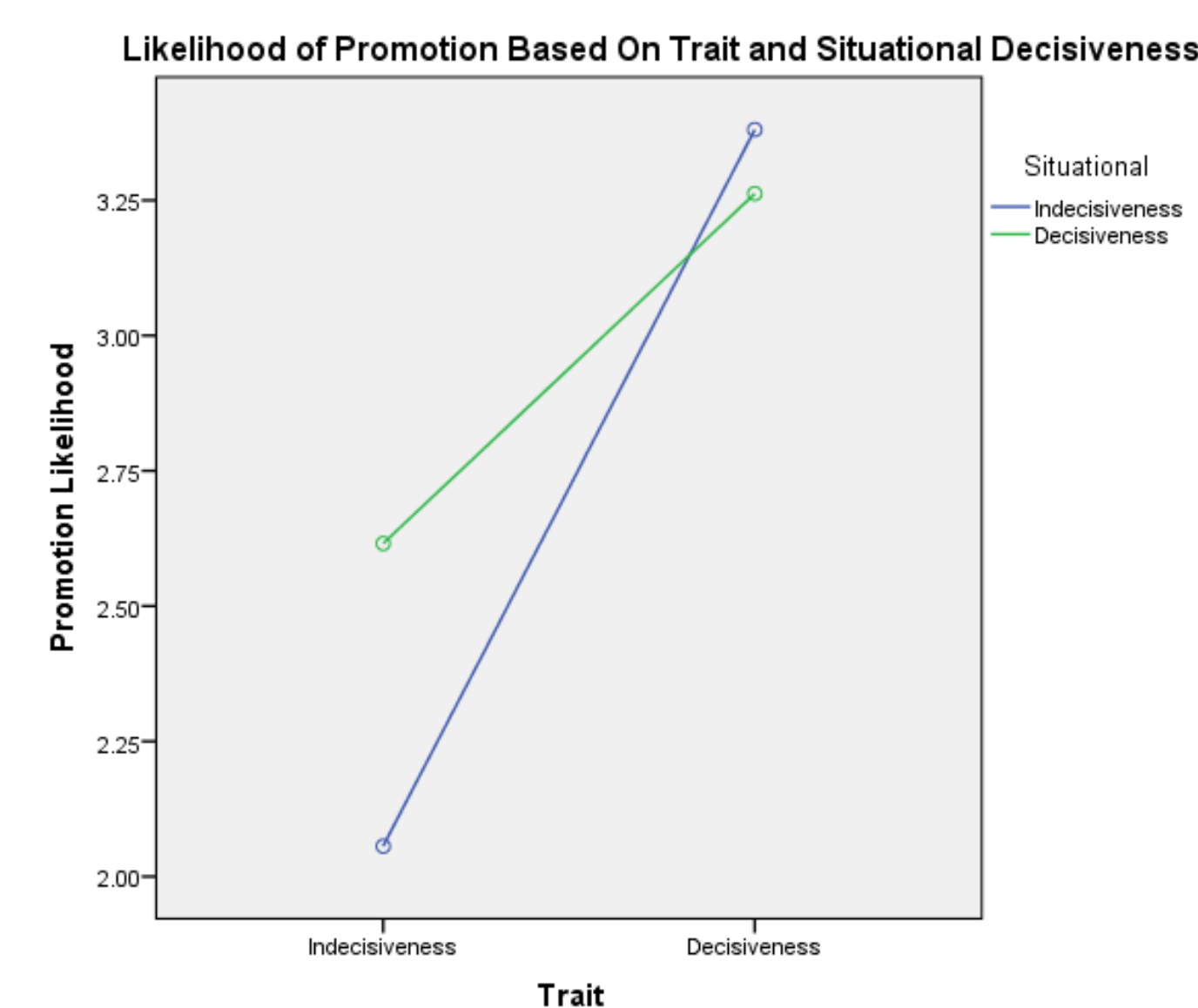
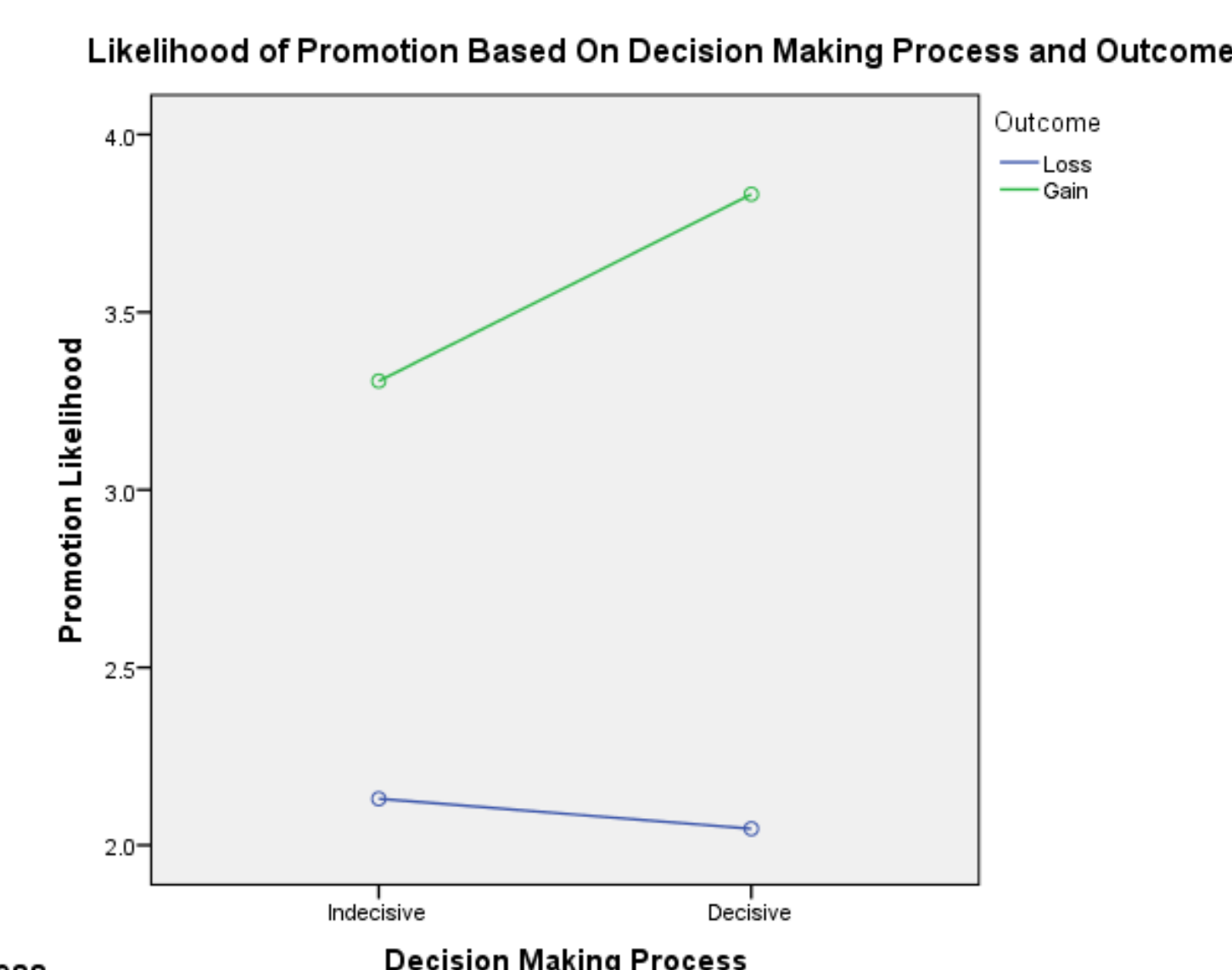
#### Research Question 2:

There was an interaction between trait and situation decisiveness,  $F(1, 240) = 9.39, p < .01$ , such that the difference in promotability between candidates who act decisively and those who act indecisively was much larger for trait indecisive candidates than for trait decisive candidates.

Candidates who are trait indecisive may be able to attenuate some of the negative perceptions about themselves by acting decisively situationally. Trait decisive candidates seem to be highly promotable regardless of their decision making style in a specific situation.

### RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** How are indecisive and decisive people perceived when they achieve similar outcomes as a result of their decision making process?



**Research Question 2:** How are trait indecisive and decisive people perceived when they act counter to their trait disposition?

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