Wisdom and decision-making in the context of migration uncertainty

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Brilliant collaborator
Mainstream theories of migration

• Many approaches
  • Functionalist
  • Historical-structural

• Factors that impact migration
  • economic opportunity and earning potential
  • political stability
  • proximity of origin to destination country

• Macro-level
  • Sees migrants as a rational decision-maker
  • Focus on the receiving countries and implications for policy

• Little insight into migrants’ psychology & their decision-making
Rational choice theory

• Model of social behavior from behavior of individual actors

• Rational behavior:
  • Goal-oriented
  • Evaluative/reflective

• Choice axiom satisfaction
  • Self-interest axiom (*homo economicus*)

• Game theory & expected utility hypothesis formalized by von Neumann & Morgenstern (1953)
  • Focus on outcomes (not premises)
Rationalist tradition

The economist doesn’t need ethics; only arithmetic. His task is to clear up social mistakes.

George Stigler, Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, 1982
Neoclassical models of decision-making are inadequate

- Social agents don’t calculate based on abstract rational criteria
  - Rather: pragmatism / “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, 2005)
- Humans don’t follow game theory principles
  - Act irrationally, prefer fairness
  - Show systematic biases in their decisions
  - Bounded by evolution & cog limits
People often act irrationally…

Player A can choose what fraction of a resource ($10) to share with anonymous Player B, who must accept the offer.
Key question

We know that some people apparently do follow rational self-interest. But others often choose not to do so. Why?
**DICTATOR GAME**

Player A can choose what fraction of a resource ($10) to share with anonymous Player B, who must accept the offer.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Folk understanding of good judgment

Rationality
- Rules of formal logic
  - consistent
- Preference-maximization
- Reductionist, abstract

Reasonableness
- Pragmatic (*phronesis*)
  - context-dependent
- Balance *across* prefer. & norms
- Non-reductionist, adjudicating

Context matters
Migrants have different motives and undergo a variety of challenges

- International student
  - initiative towards personal growth
- Temporary migrant worker
  - motivated by economic prospects
  - tend to experience insecurity and loneliness
- High-skilled migrant
  - low self-esteem, higher job dissatisfaction, and more work-related stress
  - tend to be underutilized in the workforce and underemployed
Social class

• Rational/abstract decision-maker more descriptive of upper-middle class / highly-skilled migrant
  • Modernization thesis: White vs. blue-collar occupations afford & demand more autonomy and self-direction
    • ➔ greater self-focus Grossmann & Varnum, 2011; Kraus et al., 2011
  • Pragmatic / context dependent reasoning more common in lower SES environments Grossmann & Brienza, 2017, Royal Proceedings: B
Moral decision-making

• Different forms of social consideration in different cultures/groups
  Fiske, 1992; Rai & Fiske, 2011
• Perception of actions as moral depends on motives and relationships
  • Includes violence, inequality and “impure” acts
• Cultures vary in preferences for different forms of sociality

Unity
• care and support for ingroup
• provide aid and protection

Hierarchy
• respect social rank

Equality
• balanced reciprocity
• equal treatment, say, and opportunity

Proportionality
• rewards and punishment proportional to merit, contribution
• utilitarian cost-benefit
Cultural change  Varnum & Grossmann, 2011

• Digital nomads
  • Relative number of international migrants have remained quite stable
  • More people from developed nations are becoming international migrants, choosing to work digitally in the growing gig economy
  • Globalization, technological advancements, transfer of products and labour
  • More economic opportunity without the need to migration
    • e.g., online commerce, growing gig economy
Moving forward

Suggestions:
• Integrate theories from different disciplines
• Beyond policy-oriented research ➔ also focus on fundamental scientific insights about migration

Consider:
• Decision-making from a psychological perspective
• Cultural and regional variations matter
• The changing nature of migration
Thank you!

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