

**The Rightness Loop: Power-Induced Cognitive Bias and Its Consequences
for Leadership Decision Quality — A Theoretical Framework**

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Abstract

Background: Leaders operating under sustained positional power show measurable changes in cognitive processing, particularly in error detection, perspective-taking, and the capacity to incorporate disconfirming information. Although the neuropsychological and social-psychological effects of power on individual cognition have been extensively documented, the organizational mechanism through which these individual-level effects compound over time into a self-reinforcing decision-quality spiral has received limited theoretical attention.

Objective: This paper introduces the Rightness Loop — a theoretical framework describing the mechanism through which accumulated positional power progressively impairs leadership judgment by reinforcing a cognitive tendency toward uncritical self-validation, referred to here as rightness bias.

Methods: Conceptual synthesis drawing on neuropsychological research on power and behavioral inhibition, organizational behavior literature on sycophancy, upward voice suppression, and psychological safety, and social psychology research on overconfidence and self-serving attribution.

Findings: The Rightness Loop is proposed as a three-stage self-reinforcing mechanism: (1) power-induced reduction in error-detection sensitivity and perspective-taking capacity; (2) organizational silence that removes corrective feedback before it reaches the decision-maker; and (3) self-protective attribution that assigns failures to external circumstances rather than to judgment errors. Once established, the loop is neurobiologically and organizationally self-protecting.

Conclusion: Understanding the Rightness Loop offers actionable implications for leadership development, board oversight structures, and organizational design. Breaking the

loop requires deliberate structural and behavioral interventions that go against the natural trajectory of power accumulation.

Keywords: rightness bias, power, cognitive bias, organizational silence, leadership, decision-making, overconfidence, attribution theory

1. Introduction

There is a foundational paradox at the heart of senior leadership: the accumulation of experience and authority, which is expected to sharpen judgment, appears under certain conditions to systematically undermine it. Research across organizational behavior, social psychology, and cognitive neuroscience has documented that individuals who hold sustained positional power tend to exhibit reduced perspective-taking, diminished error-detection sensitivity, and a heightened propensity toward overconfidence in their own assessments (Galinsky et al., 2006; Keltner et al., 2003; Russo & Schoemaker, 1992). These are not the cognitive signatures of sharpened wisdom; they are the signatures of impaired judgment.

The organizational literature has long recognized that leaders sometimes fail — and fail catastrophically — not because they lack information, but because the information they hold is filtered through cognitive and organizational processes that systematically distort it. Groupthink (Janis, 1972), the normalization of deviance (Vaughan, 1996), and hubris syndrome (Owen & Davidson, 2009) have all been proposed as frameworks for understanding why high-status decision-makers fail to process available evidence correctly. Yet each of these frameworks captures only part of the mechanism. Groupthink describes the group-level dynamics of collective bias; normalization of deviance focuses on incremental institutional drift; hubris syndrome describes a personality-level deterioration. What remains undertheorized is the specific organizational mechanism through which individual cognitive bias under power accumulates over time into a self-reinforcing loop at the intersection of cognition and organizational information flow.

This paper proposes the Rightness Loop as an integrative theoretical framework to address this gap. The Rightness Loop describes a three-stage mechanism through which sustained positional power progressively degrades leadership decision quality via a self-reinforcing cycle. At Stage 1, accumulated power activates neuropsychological changes that

reduce the leader's sensitivity to error signals and disconfirming information — a tendency we term rightness bias. At Stage 2, the leader's organizational environment adapts to the apparent preferences and reactions of the powerful incumbent, progressively suppressing upward voice and creating a structural feedback deprivation (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). At Stage 3, when decisions fail, self-protective attribution assigns the failure to external circumstances rather than to judgment, thereby preserving confidence and preventing the corrective learning that could disrupt the cycle.

The central research question motivating this paper is: Through what mechanism does accumulated positional power generate a self-reinforcing loop of cognitive bias in leadership decision-making? The Rightness Loop framework offers a theoretically integrated answer by synthesizing evidence across neuropsychology, organizational behavior, and attribution research — three domains that have largely addressed these phenomena in isolation.

The theoretical contributions of this paper are threefold. First, the framework integrates neuropsychological research on power with organizational silence theory in a single explanatory model. Second, it introduces the concept of rightness bias as a distinct theoretical construct — distinguishable from overconfidence, narcissism, or hubris — that captures the specific pattern of uncritical self-validation that power induces. Third, it proposes a set of moderating conditions and intervention strategies that follow logically from the framework, with implications for leadership development, board design, and organizational safety.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature across four domains: power and cognition, rightness bias and overconfidence, organizational silence and feedback deprivation, and attribution theory. Section 3 presents the Rightness Loop framework in full, including its three stages, the self-reinforcing dynamic, and moderating factors. Section 4 discusses theoretical contributions, practical implications, and the challenge

of disrupting an established loop. Section 5 addresses limitations and directions for future research. Section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Power and Cognition

The relationship between power and cognition has been systematically investigated since Keltner et al.'s (2003) foundational proposal of the approach/inhibition theory of power. The theory holds that high power activates the behavioral approach system — associated with action orientation, reward seeking, and reduced sensitivity to social constraints — while suppressing the behavioral inhibition system, which governs threat sensitivity, social vigilance, and caution. The practical cognitive consequences are significant: individuals experiencing high power show reduced propensity to consider others' perspectives, reduced attention to contextual cues that might signal risk, and increased confidence in their own judgments (Keltner et al., 2003).

A particularly consequential cognitive effect of power is the reduction in perspective-taking. Galinsky et al. (2006) demonstrated experimentally that individuals primed with high power were significantly worse at perspective-taking tasks than low-power individuals, even when explicitly instructed to consider another person's viewpoint. This effect operates at a level below conscious deliberation: the high-power participant believes they are attending to others' perspectives while neuropsychologically failing to engage the full cognitive apparatus required. This is a critical finding for the Rightness Loop framework, because it suggests that the power-induced reduction in perspective-taking is not primarily a motivational problem (the leader choosing not to listen) but a neuropsychological one (the leader's cognitive systems not activating the listening process as fully as required).

Anderson and Berdahl (2002) further demonstrated that the experience of subjective power — one's sense of holding power, regardless of objective rank — produces significant shifts in approach-oriented behavior and reduced inhibition of dominant responses. The implication for organizational contexts is that perceived power, which is partly a function of tenure, reputation, and accumulated deference from colleagues, can produce these cognitive effects even in the absence of formal authority changes. A leader who has held a position for a decade and has never been seriously challenged may experience power-level cognition that exceeds their formal authority.

More recent neuroscientific work has extended these findings to the level of prefrontal cortex functioning. Inesi et al. (2011) demonstrated that power reduces the perceived need for personal control through alternative means — including the verification and double-checking of one's own judgments — because the sense of power itself provides a functional substitute for the certainty that thorough verification would produce. This finding is directly relevant to the Rightness Loop: power reduces the motivation to seek disconfirming information precisely because the power holder subjectively feels sufficiently certain without it.

2.2 Rightness Bias and Overconfidence in Senior Leadership

Overconfidence — the systematic overestimation of one's own accuracy and judgment quality — is among the most robust and well-replicated findings in behavioral decision research (Moore & Healy, 2008; Russo & Schoemaker, 1992). At the leadership level, overconfidence has been associated with excessive risk-taking, escalation of commitment to failing courses of action, and the underweighting of expert dissent (Russo & Schoemaker, 1992). The phenomenon is distinct from simple miscalibration; it involves a systematic tendency to treat one's beliefs as more certain, and one's predictions as more accurate, than the evidence warrants.

Nickerson's (1998) comprehensive review of confirmation bias — the tendency to search for, interpret, and recall information in a way that confirms one's prior beliefs — provides the cognitive mechanism through which rightness bias operates at the level of information processing. Confirmation bias is not a deliberate strategy; it is a default cognitive tendency that operates automatically and is particularly pronounced when the belief in question is strongly held and self-referential. For a senior leader who has built a career and identity around a set of strategic beliefs, the self-referential dimension of confirmation bias is especially potent.

The concept of rightness bias, as proposed in the Rightness Loop framework, is related to but distinct from overconfidence and confirmation bias. Rightness bias refers specifically to the a priori cognitive treatment of one's own current assessment as correct — not merely the overestimation of accuracy, but the structural failure to engage the cognitive processes that would be needed to evaluate whether the assessment is accurate. Where overconfidence describes calibration error (confidence exceeds accuracy), and confirmation bias describes selective information processing (search favors confirming evidence), rightness bias describes a more fundamental orientation: the leader approaches the decision situation already 'knowing' the answer, and the subsequent cognitive work is rationalization rather than analysis.

This distinction has important theoretical and practical implications. Overconfidence and confirmation bias can potentially be corrected through training, feedback, and deliberate process interventions (Russo & Schoemaker, 1992). Rightness bias, as conceptualized here, is more resistant to these interventions because it undermines the metacognitive awareness that would be needed to recognize and correct it. The leader who has developed rightness bias does not typically perceive a need for correction — which is precisely what makes the loop self-reinforcing.

2.3 Organizational Silence and Feedback Deprivation

The second stage of the Rightness Loop operates at the organizational level: even if the leader's internal cognitive processes were fully functional, the information environment that power creates tends systematically to filter out the signals that would correct rightness bias. Morrison and Milliken's (2000) seminal theory of organizational silence proposes that organizational climates characterized by top-down decision-making, low trust, and managerial assumptions about employee voice create conditions in which the collective withholding of information becomes the organizational norm. Their theory identifies two primary mechanisms: managerial beliefs that create implicit signals about the value and safety of speaking up, and structural features that make speaking costly relative to silence.

Milliken et al.'s (2003) empirical investigation of employee silence found that employees routinely withhold meaningful concerns — including concerns about quality, safety, ethics, and strategy — from their superiors, primarily because they fear negative consequences. These consequences need not be severe or explicit; the anticipation of a dismissive reaction, of being labeled as a problem, or of being excluded from future decisions is sufficient to produce silence. Critically, the leader who generates these anticipations need not do so deliberately. A history of visibly dismissing dissent, even in isolated incidents, is sufficient to produce generalized silence in an entire team or organization.

Detert and Edmondson (2011) introduced the concept of implicit voice theories — the taken-for-granted cognitive schemas that employees hold about when and whether it is appropriate to speak up to authority. These schemas are largely tacit and are acquired through experience; they do not require explicit instruction from the leader. A leader who rewards agreement and visibly devalues challenge — even subtly and unknowingly — trains the organization's implicit voice theories in the direction of silence. The result is a structural

feedback deprivation: the leader is receiving information, but the information is systematically filtered to align with what subordinates believe the leader wants to hear.

Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety research established that the degree to which team members feel safe to speak up, take risks, and offer dissenting views is strongly predicted by leader behavior — specifically, by the leader's responsiveness to interpersonal risk-taking. High-power leaders who have not deliberately cultivated psychological safety tend to preside over teams with low psychological safety, which in turn means that the corrective information available in the team's collective knowledge base does not flow upward. This is the organizational mechanism through which the Rightness Loop's Stage 2 operates: not through conspiratorial filtering but through the normal operation of learned organizational behavior.

2.4 Attribution Theory and Self-Protection

The third stage of the Rightness Loop involves the cognitive processing of failure. Attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) provides the theoretical basis for understanding how decision-makers interpret the outcomes of their decisions. Weiner's framework identifies attributions along two primary dimensions: locus (internal vs. external) and stability (stable vs. unstable). A well-established finding in attribution research is the self-serving attribution bias: individuals systematically attribute success to internal causes (their own ability, judgment, or effort) and failure to external causes (bad luck, subordinate incompetence, or market conditions).

Under conditions of sustained power, the self-serving attribution bias is intensified. Anderson and Galinsky (2006) found that high-power individuals are more likely to make risky judgments and to attribute the outcomes of those judgments to their own skill when they succeed, while attributing failures to external variability. This asymmetric attribution pattern

is directly relevant to the Rightness Loop: when Stage 1 (rightness bias) and Stage 2 (organizational silence) combine to produce a poor decision, Stage 3 prevents the corrective learning that failure could otherwise provide. The loop's self-protecting function lies precisely here: it converts the signal that should break the cycle — a clear decision failure — into evidence that is attributed elsewhere.

Lerner's (1980) work on the belief in a just world adds a further dimension: individuals who hold power in meritocratic systems tend to believe that outcomes reflect desert and competence. For a leader operating within this belief system, the failure of a decision is cognitively threatening precisely because it implies a failure of competence. The self-serving attribution bias functions as a cognitive defense against this threat, and power intensifies the need for that defense by raising the stakes of the competence judgment.

3. The Rightness Loop: A Theoretical Framework

3.1 Framework Overview

The Rightness Loop is proposed as a three-stage self-reinforcing mechanism that operates simultaneously at the individual psychological level and the organizational level. The three stages are mutually reinforcing: each stage creates conditions that intensify the other two. The loop is not primarily a personality phenomenon — it does not require a leader who is narcissistic, incompetent, or malicious. It is a structural phenomenon that emerges from the intersection of normal neuropsychological responses to power and normal organizational dynamics of voice and silence. This is, paradoxically, what makes it so prevalent and so difficult to interrupt.

The loop can be described formally as follows: sustained positional power P induces rightness bias B in the leader's cognitive processing. Rightness bias, combined with the leader's observed behavioral signals, generates organizational silence S through the

suppression of upward voice. Organizational silence removes corrective feedback F from the leader's information environment. In the absence of corrective feedback, decision failures are processed through self-protective attribution A, which assigns failures externally, preserving B and reinforcing S. The cycle then continues, typically intensifying over time as the role tenure extends and the silence culture deepens.

3.2 Stage 1 — Power-Induced Rightness Bias

At Stage 1, sustained positional power induces a specific pattern of cognitive processing that we term rightness bias. As described in Section 2.1, this involves the neuropsychological suppression of the behavioral inhibition system — which governs error-detection and threat-sensitivity — and the activation of the behavioral approach system, which generates action orientation and confidence. The subjective experience of the leader at this stage is not distorted: from the inside, their judgments feel fully considered and well-founded. This is a critical feature of rightness bias that distinguishes it from simple arrogance or overconfidence; the leader is not aware of having stopped listening.

Stage 1 does not require a sudden change; it develops gradually over the course of a leader's tenure in a high-power role. Early in a role, the leader is more likely to experience the behavioral inhibition system as active — new situations generate caution, new colleagues generate perspective-taking, and uncertainty generates information-seeking. As the role becomes familiar and as accumulated deference from subordinates provides repeated confirmations of the leader's assessments, the behavioral approach system becomes progressively dominant. The leader develops what might be described colloquially as 'knowing how to read a room' — but what is actually a pattern of reading rooms in ways that confirm prior expectations.

The reduction in perspective-taking capacity (Galinsky et al., 2006) has particular organizational consequences. Senior leaders are, by definition, dependent on the perspectives of subordinates and specialists for the information they cannot directly observe. A leader whose perspective-taking is compromised by power is therefore precisely the leader who is most dependent on functional organizational information systems — and, as Stage 2 will describe, least likely to have them.

3.3 Stage 2 — Organizational Silence as Feedback Deprivation

As the leader's power consolidates and rightness bias becomes established, the organizational environment undergoes a parallel and complementary change. Drawing on Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Detert and Edmondson (2011), we propose that the organizational environment adapts to the high-power leader's observed behavioral signals, progressively suppressing upward voice and creating what we term structural feedback deprivation — a condition in which the leader continues to receive information inputs, but those inputs are systematically filtered to align with the leader's apparent preferences and existing beliefs.

Structural feedback deprivation operates through three distinct mechanisms. First, direct suppression: team members who have experienced or observed the leader's dismissal of dissenting views directly calculate the risk of future dissent and reduce it. Second, proxy filtering: middle-level managers who channel information to the senior leader progressively adjust their framing of information to minimize negative signals and maximize positive ones, not through deliberate deception but through the normal human tendency to manage impressions with powerful others. Third, selection bias: over time, the people who remain in the leader's inner circle tend disproportionately to be those who have been comfortable with the established expectations — those who found the implicit silencing norms intolerable having already exited.

The result is that the leader's information environment at Stage 2 is not simply incomplete — it is systematically skewed. The leader is receiving information, holding meetings, reading reports, and consulting colleagues. But the information passing through these channels has been processed through a filter that the leader cannot see and subordinates may not consciously acknowledge. This is the organizational mechanism that connects individual cognitive bias to organizational decision failure: the individual's impaired error-detection combines with the organization's impaired error-transmission to produce a double-layer failure of corrective feedback.

3.4 Stage 3 — Self-Protective Attribution

When the decisions produced by the Stage 1-Stage 2 combination produce poor outcomes, Stage 3 activates. The self-serving attribution bias described in Section 2.4 assigns the failure to external circumstances — market conditions, subordinate execution failures, regulatory changes, or timing — rather than to the quality of the decision itself. This attribution is experienced by the leader as a genuine and reasoned interpretation of events; it is not recognized as a defense mechanism.

Stage 3 is the loop's most insidious feature because it disables the one signal that might otherwise break the cycle. Decision failures, in principle, provide the most direct available evidence that a leader's judgment requires recalibration. They are the corrective input that bypasses both the leader's own bias (Stage 1) and the organizational filtering (Stage 2) because they are facts in the world that cannot be entirely suppressed. Stage 3 prevents this corrective function by re-attributing the failure before the causal analysis can proceed far enough to implicate the leader's judgment. The failure is recorded as a data point about the environment — not as a data point about the leader's decision quality.

Stage 3 also has a secondary organizational effect: by publicly attributing failures to external factors or to subordinate execution, the leader reinforces the organizational climate of Stage 2. Team members observe that failure is attributed to them — even when they know the decision was made above them — and update their implicit voice theories further in the direction of silence. Speaking up, they observe, not only risks dismissal of the concern before the fact; it also risks being blamed for the outcome after the fact. Stage 3 therefore feeds back into Stage 2, and through Stage 2 into Stage 1, completing and reinforcing the loop.

3.5 The Self-Reinforcing Dynamic

The three stages of the Rightness Loop are mutually reinforcing in ways that increase its intensity over time. As Stage 1 deepens with role tenure, the leader's rightness bias becomes more entrenched and more resistant to the kind of metacognitive challenge that would require acknowledging its existence. As Stage 2 deepens with accumulated silencing signals, the organizational silence culture becomes self-sustaining — new team members entering the organization quickly learn the norms without any explicit instruction. As Stage 3 becomes the established interpretive frame for failures, it prevents any individual failure from generating the sustained corrective pressure that could disrupt the cycle.

The dynamic has a critical implication for intervention timing: the Rightness Loop is significantly easier to disrupt at early stages than at later stages. In the early phases of a leader's tenure, Stage 1 bias is less entrenched, Stage 2 silence is less culturally established, and Stage 3 attribution has less historical precedent to draw on. Interventions at this stage — structural mechanisms for upward voice, explicit challenge invitations, 360-degree feedback processes — can prevent the loop from becoming self-sustaining. In late stages, by contrast, the same interventions may be insufficient because the organizational culture has already adapted and the leader's cognitive patterns have become habitual.

3.6 Moderating Factors

The Rightness Loop is not inevitable; several factors moderate its development and intensity. Role tenure is the most obvious: longer tenure in a high-power role increases the probability that all three stages are fully established. However, the relationship between tenure and loop intensity is likely non-linear — there may be tipping points at which the loop becomes self-sustaining, before which interventions are effective and after which they are not.

Organizational culture is a critical moderator, particularly through the construct of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Organizations that have built explicit norms and structural mechanisms for upward voice — including anonymous feedback channels, mandatory devil's advocate roles, and protected dissent forums — create a countervailing force against Stage 2's silence-inducing dynamics. These mechanisms do not prevent Stage 1 bias but they ensure that corrective feedback is structurally guaranteed to reach the leader even when the normal organizational dynamics would suppress it.

Individual differences also moderate loop development. Leaders high in openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997) may be more likely to actively seek disconfirming information even as power accumulates, thereby slowing the development of Stage 1 bias. Leaders with high cognitive complexity — the capacity to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously — may maintain perspective-taking capacity under power conditions that would impair others. These individual differences do not inoculate against the loop entirely but may significantly delay its onset or reduce its intensity.

Finally, board and governance structure functions as an external moderator. Leaders who are subject to rigorous board oversight, with genuinely independent directors who have access to organizational information that bypasses the senior leader's filtering, are less able to

sustain a Rightness Loop without external challenge. Governance structures that allow the senior leader to control board information flows, by contrast, can be captured by the loop — the same organizational silence dynamics that operate within the leader's team can extend to the board relationship.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The Rightness Loop framework makes three distinct theoretical contributions to the existing literature on leadership cognition and organizational behavior. First, it provides an integrative mechanism that connects previously separate bodies of research. The neuropsychological literature on power (Keltner et al., 2003; Galinsky et al., 2006), the organizational silence literature (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Detert & Edmondson, 2011), and the attribution literature (Weiner, 1985; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006) have each documented part of the phenomenon that the Rightness Loop synthesizes into a single, coherent mechanism. The integration reveals interactions between these levels that would not be visible within any single disciplinary tradition.

Second, the concept of rightness bias offers a theoretically precise construct that is distinguishable from existing related concepts. Unlike overconfidence, which describes a calibration error, rightness bias describes a pre-epistemic orientation — the assumption of correctness before the cognitive process of evaluation begins. Unlike confirmation bias, which describes selective information processing, rightness bias describes a motivational disengagement from the evaluative process. Unlike hubris syndrome (Owen & Davidson, 2009), which describes a personality-level pathology requiring clinical-level symptoms, rightness bias is a normal cognitive consequence of structural power that can develop in otherwise psychologically healthy leaders.

Third, the framework extends existing concepts of groupthink (Janis, 1972) and normalization of deviance (Vaughan, 1996) by specifying the cognitive-organizational interface through which individual bias and collective silence interact. Groupthink describes a group-level phenomenon in which members suppress dissent for social cohesion; the Rightness Loop describes the leader-level mechanism that generates the conditions for groupthink. Normalization of deviance describes the gradual institutional acceptance of risk; the Rightness Loop describes the cognitive and organizational mechanism through which the decision-maker fails to register the accumulating risk signals.

4.2 Practical Implications

The Rightness Loop framework has actionable implications across leadership development, organizational design, and governance. In leadership development, the framework suggests that the standard repertoire of leadership training — strategic thinking, communication, delegation — is insufficient without explicit attention to the cognitive vulnerabilities that power creates. Leaders who are aware of rightness bias as a structural consequence of their role are better positioned to take deliberate countermeasures: actively soliciting dissent, structurally requiring devil's advocate perspectives, and maintaining relationships with trusted advisors who are explicitly empowered to disagree without professional consequences.

In organizational design, the framework suggests that upward voice mechanisms are not merely HR practices but organizational risk management tools. Anonymous reporting systems, structured dissent protocols, and regular skip-level feedback processes all function as technical interventions against the Stage 2 dynamics of the Rightness Loop. These mechanisms work precisely because they bypass the normal organizational hierarchy through which Stage 2 filtering operates. They do not depend on individual courage to speak up —

they create structural channels through which information flows regardless of the psychological climate.

For board oversight, the framework implies that board effectiveness in preventing leadership decision quality deterioration depends critically on the independence of the board's information sources from the senior leader's filtering. Boards that rely entirely on the CEO for organizational information are effectively captured by Stage 2 dynamics. Boards that maintain independent channels to CFOs, Chief Risk Officers, and independent auditors — and that create formal mechanisms for receiving concerns that bypass the CEO — are structurally positioned to detect Rightness Loop dynamics before they produce catastrophic outcomes.

4.3 The Disruption Imperative

The most practically important implication of the Rightness Loop framework is the difficulty of disrupting the loop once it is established. Because Stage 1 bias impairs the very metacognitive capacity that would be needed to recognize the bias, and because Stage 2 silence has removed the corrective feedback that would create external pressure for recognition, disruption typically requires either an external actor with sufficient power to override the loop (a board, a regulatory intervention, a crisis) or a deliberate prior commitment by the leader — made before the loop is established — to specific accountability mechanisms that cannot be disabled once the loop begins.

This suggests a counterintuitive leadership development priority: the most effective time to build loop-disruption mechanisms is at the beginning of a leadership tenure, before Stage 1 bias is established, before Stage 2 silence has become culturally embedded, and before Stage 3 attribution has a history of precedent. A leader who commits publicly and structurally to specific channels of unsolicited challenge at the beginning of their role is

creating organizational facts that constrain their own future behavior — and that may remain effective even after the loop's other stages have developed.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This paper presents a conceptual framework and therefore carries the limitations inherent in all theoretical papers: the proposed mechanisms have not been directly empirically tested. The Rightness Loop is constructed through the integration of empirical findings from separate research traditions, and while those individual findings are well-established, the specific three-stage loop as proposed here remains a theoretical conjecture pending direct empirical evaluation. The framework's claims regarding the self-reinforcing dynamic, the role-tenure trajectory, and the moderating effects of psychological safety and individual differences all require empirical investigation.

Future research directions include: longitudinal studies examining the relationship between CEO tenure and measured indices of decision quality (e.g., acquisition performance, earnings forecast accuracy, strategic pivot success rates) with organizational silence as a mediating variable; experimental paradigms that simulate the three-stage loop in controlled organizational settings; and psychometric development of a rightness bias scale that could be used to assess the construct validity of Stage 1. Cross-cultural validation is also essential, as the power distance dimensions identified by Hofstede (1980) are likely to moderate the Stage 2 dynamics substantially across national organizational cultures.

The framework also requires more nuanced treatment of boundary conditions. Not all high-power leaders develop the Rightness Loop, and not all organizational contexts are equally vulnerable to Stage 2 silence dynamics. The conditions under which the loop does not develop — or develops and is successfully disrupted — are as theoretically interesting as the conditions under which it becomes self-sustaining. Case studies of leaders who have

explicitly and successfully resisted these dynamics could generate rich hypotheses for future quantitative investigation.

6. Conclusion

The Rightness Loop framework proposes a three-stage self-reinforcing mechanism through which sustained positional power progressively impairs leadership decision quality: power-induced rightness bias reduces error-detection sensitivity; organizational silence removes corrective feedback; and self-protective attribution prevents failures from generating corrective learning. Together, these stages create a cognitive-organizational feedback loop that is both self-sustaining and resistant to the normal corrective mechanisms that organizations and leaders otherwise rely on.

The framework's core argument is that leadership experience creates wisdom and simultaneously creates a neuropsychologically grounded vulnerability. The paradox is that the very features of a successful leader's situation — accumulated authority, extensive tenure, organizational deference — are also the features that most reliably produce the conditions for the Rightness Loop. This is not a counsel of pessimism about leadership; it is a call for structural humility — for building into the design of leadership roles the explicit countermeasures that prevent the natural trajectory of power from becoming a decision-quality liability.

The most dangerous leader is not the one who lacks experience. It is the one whose experience has never been systematically challenged — whose judgments have been consistently confirmed, whose failures have been consistently attributed elsewhere, and whose organization has learned not to disagree. The Rightness Loop describes how this condition develops, and by describing it, offers the conceptual tools for preventing it.

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