
What are the Biases the May be Affecting Your Decisions

By: Robin Pedrelli

Bias can cloud our judgment and our decision-making process and can cause us to overlook strengths in one person and weaknesses in another. It's important to note that we all have some level of bias. Individual biases are personal and unique and are based on our individual backgrounds, cultural influences and experiences.

That being said, there are several types of biases that frequently show-up in our workplaces and can negatively impact progress made toward diversity and inclusion related goals and objectives.

Here are just a few examples:

Like me / In-group Bias: The tendency for people to more easily relate to and trust individuals from their own group or criticize those from others. Think about your friend group or the people you eat lunch with every day. Think about your go-to people at work – who do you ask advice from or seek guidance? How like you are the people you trust the most?

- Tip: Take some time out of each day to get to know all the people on your team or in your workgroup as individuals. Invite someone to lunch you've never dined with. Challenge yourself to seek input from various team members versus always going to the same couple of people.

The Halo/Horn Effect: The judgment of a person's character is generalized from a positive (halo) or negative impression (horns) based on one particular attribute. For example, people with an accent are often perceived to be less intelligent than people who speak without an accent. This holds true for people who have a foreign accent and even for individuals who speak with an accent from a different part of the country.

- Tip: Look at the whole picture. Make a list of all the pros or positive attributes of a decision or person and weigh it against the cons or negative attributes. Make sure your list includes only the facts.

Confirmation Bias: The tendency for people to make an initial judgment and pay closer attention to the evidence to back it up. For example, you may form an opinion that a

coworker is less committed and doesn't work as hard as you because he or she leaves every day at five to get their children from daycare. You then pay closer attention to every time that person comes in late to work or misses a deadline as a way to confirm your bias that he or she isn't working as hard while justifying your own missed deadlines or the deadlines of coworkers who spend more face-time in the office.

- Tip: Test your assumptions and focus on the facts. Ask yourself if this judgment accurately represents the person's character or if you might be looking for something to confirm your bias.

Gambler's Fallacy: The tendency to use previous experiences to predict future behaviors. For example, if you played sports at the college level, your experience may be that athletes are driven and hardworking. This previous experience lends itself to a personal bias or belief that all athletes are hardworking which could cause you to more highly value the ideas of coworkers who are fellow athletes or to choose to work with athletes over non-athletes.

- Tip: Again, facts are your friend. Make a list of all the possible outcomes and think realistically about the likelihood of each potential outcome. You may find that the decisions that are most contradictory to your previous experience may have a greater likelihood of producing the desired effects.

Status Quo Bias: The tendency to make decisions based on what we know and are comfortable with and will result in the least amount of change. The status quo bias can shut us off to ideas shared by younger or newer employees or ideas that challenge the status quo.

- Tip: Ask for the input and ideas from a diverse group of people and make sure everyone has a voice at the table. Make it a habit to take calculated risks by investing in unconventional ideas and exploring concepts that challenge the status quo.

Bandwagon Effect: The tendency to go with the flow and to allow the opinion of the crowd to dictate our own opinions and impact our decisions. There are examples throughout history that demonstrate the power of the bandwagon effect. The fashion industry is rooted in the bandwagon effect and most of us over the age of 45 remember the Cabbage Patch doll craze of 1983. In our organizations the bandwagon effect can lead to organizational norms and patterns in decision-making that detract from diversity and inclusion.

- **Tip:** When in a situation where groupthink can influence decisions and outcomes, take a breath, pause and ask yourself what do **I** really think? Respectfully challenge the assumptions of the crowd by respectfully asking questions and engaging the group in productive debate. Simple questions like “tell me more about why you think that?” Or “help me understand” can be very powerful. Also, in meetings ask one person to be the challenger. Often times just having one person challenge the group think can be powerful in overcoming the bandwagon effect.

As an exercise in reflection, make a list of all these biases you see play out in your workplace over the next week. Reflect on the tips and think about how the results may be different if you, or those involved, practiced these tips.

Robin Pedrelli is the co-founder and partner of VisionSpring, Inc. VisionSpring, Inc. is a WBENC certified women owned and operated diversity and inclusion consulting firm offering fully integrated strategy development, workforce planning, training and continuous learning solutions to leverage diversity and inclusion to drive innovation and improved business outcomes. We provide customized strategic solutions that address the specific needs of each client and blend workforce, workplace, marketplace and community related goals.