

REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: CONFIRMATION BIAS

SHORT DESCRIPTION

WHAT:

The confirmation bias is one of the most common and it is used all the time to convince ourselves that our opinions and decisions are right.

PROBLEM:

This bias can help us stay stuck, simply repeating the same thoughts and behaviors, and significantly minimize one of our most important skills: to think creatively and adapt to emerging situations.

SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation will make you more aware of the confirmation bias and the meditation itself will help you be more open-minded, limiting the detrimental effects of the confirmation bias.



Confirmation bias is perhaps one of the most common biases we have. The tendency to seek confirmation of our views is only natural and serves to keep at least the illusion of consistency.

The problem is that in an attempt to preserve such consistency we actually can ignore important information.

One of the problems in today's social media culture is the prevalence of fake news and this only serves the confirmation bias even more.

If you see something that seems to run counter to your views, it's easy to dismiss it as fake or false, whereas information that supports your views is not seen – and dismissed – so suspiciously.

Recognizing the perils of confirmation bias is critical if you want to consider yourself objective and not simply a slave to your long held beliefs.



Fortunately for serious minds, a bias recognized is a bias sterilized.

– Benjamin Haydon

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WAYS TO AVOID CONFIRMATION BIAS

1.

Understand that the intersection of your views and decisions and new information is complex. For example, you just decided to buy a Ford rather than a Toyota SUV. You come across a piece that states Toyota SUVs are much more popular in a survey conducted on the west coast. Does that mean you made a poor choice? Or will you dismiss this as fake news in an attempt to confirm your decision?

Alternatively, you might recognize that as you live in the North-east, your driving needs are different from someone on the West coast, and that the survey really doesn't reflect on your choice very much, if at all. In short, avoid the temptation to be impulsive to either confirm or disconfirm your choices and views.

2.

Don't be afraid to modify your views. It doesn't mean you have to completely revise your narratives and opinions but you might be able to see the subtleties and the effects of context.

See the car buying example above. Both model cars have their plusses and minuses. Being rigid in your views is actually a sign of insecurity. Don't you want to be flexible enough to have evolving views?

3.

Mindfulness and meditation exercises will help you develop more control and will act as a counter to impulsiveness.

If your first response when seeing information that runs counter to your perceptions and views is impulsive denial, you will be encased in the chains of your emotions and at risk of abandoning critical thinking. Mindfulness in general gives you much better emotional control, and this greater chance of staying rational.

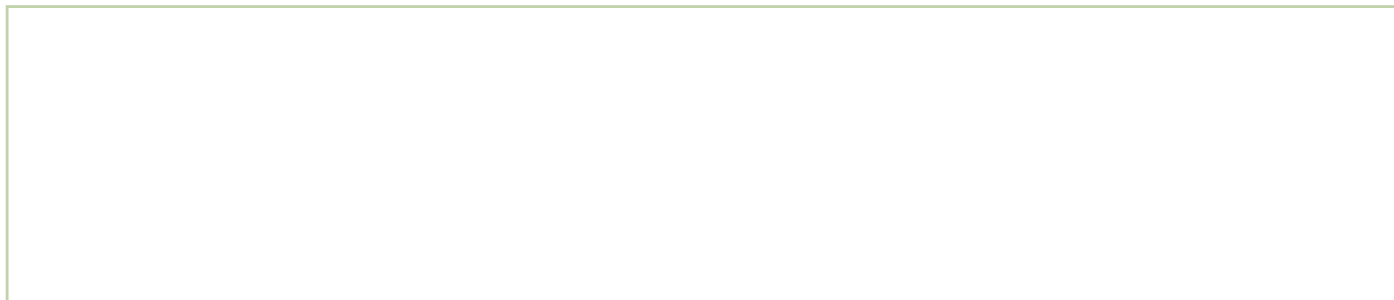
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Being deeply knowledgeable on one subject narrows one's focus and increases confidence, but it also blurs dissenting views until they are no longer visible, thereby transforming data collection into bias confirmation and morphing self-deception into self-assurance.

– Michael Shermer

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So, what do we do when faced with such apparent contradictions, and even real ones?



Confirmation bias is one of the most common forms of distortion that all of us practice. It reflects the default setting of the human mind – to require consistency in our thoughts, behaviors, opinions and narratives.

Such consistency is actually a lot to ask for because there are subtleties of difference between seemingly consistent ideas.

So, what do we do when faced with such apparent contradictions, and even real ones? Often, we simply don't tolerate the apparent discrepancy and become very extreme in our thinking. We opt for what is effectively a superficial consistency.

By reducing the world through binary thinking to an absurdly simplistic perception we fail to understand subtlety and think in gross generalizations that often don't pass close inspection, or any inspection.

You chose a new marketing strategy, favoring strategy B over strategy A. Subsequently you will not only notice all the examples of strategy A that you see, you also will seek out (and remember) all the positive news and information about strategy A and all the negative stuff about strategy B.

You will also ignore, minimize and forget all the positive information about Strategy A and the negative stuff about strategy B. Remember we're rationalizers not rational.

There's a chance that when you do see content praising strategy A's superiority, you'll dismiss it as "fake news" or find some way to diminish it or ignore it altogether.

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We tend to accept information that confirms our prior beliefs and ignore or discredit information that does not. This confirmation bias settles over our eyes like distorting spectacles for everything we look at.

– Kyle Hill

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Confirmation bias is so strong that it can lead us into extremist positions. We simply will not consider, let alone analyze, let alone accept, ideas that conflict with our beliefs and opinions.

We do that with ideas that don't just conflict with our opinions but just question them. Our minds are set and there's nothing we can do about it. Or can we?



Of course, we are quick to point out the confirmation bias in other people, especially those with different and opposing views. We know that they are merely looking for what they want to see, and listening for what they want to hear.

However, isn't it the height of hypocrisy to criticize and ridicule others for using the same biases – and in the same way -- that you do?

As a leader, it is important to be open-minded about choices and decisions. This is why it is very important to have team members who are encouraged to provide alternative views. The opinions of others around you can create a confirmation bias or protect you from it.

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MEDITATION

Confirmation bias is ingrained in our thinking. It's not likely to go away, but we can at least be more aware of it in our own thinking and try to manage it the best we can. You should be motivated to do this because a biased mind can make some poor decisions.

A bias recognized is a bias sterilized. A bias recognized is a bias sterilized.

In many ways, life is about change and adaptation. However, we often resist it and cling to our old habits and beliefs.

Great leaders give up their resistance to change.
Great leaders give up their resistance to open-mindedness.

Recognizing what you don't know and being open-minded about what you do know are the essence of wisdom.

Confirmation bias is like distorting spectacles that don't challenge you and keep you in old habits.
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Open your eyes and be prepared to consider anything, instead of reflexively discarding it, and throwing it in the trash. You might be surprised at what you find.

You see the confirmation bias in others, but you won't accept it in yourself. How do you account for that inconsistency? If you criticize others for not being willing to consider different perspectives, how can you not do that yourself?

Give up your resistance to change.
Give up your resistance to open-mindedness.

Recognizing what you don't know and being open-minded about what you do know are the essence of wisdom. Confirmation bias is like distorting spectacles that don't challenge you and keep you in old habits.

Great leaders don't transform data collection into bias confirmation.
Great leaders don't let confirmation bias morph into self-deception into self-assurance.