

REDUCING WORKPLACE BIAS: NAIVE REALISM

SHORT DESCRIPTION

WHAT:

Naive Realism is the tendency to assume that we are completely rational and have a very objective view of reality.

PROBLEM:

Naive Realism can lead to serious issues as you over-confidently misperceive the reality of the events in your life. This can not only lead to disappointments but it can lead to disastrous misperception of yourself and terrible decision-making. While optimism is a useful trait, overconfidence can be disastrous.

SOLUTION:

The lesson and meditation will improve your awareness, making you more sensitive to the world around you and how you interact with it. They will help you see reality more clearly.



The concept of naïve realism in many ways is about the many biases we use to support our view that we are completely rational and perceive the world exactly as it is.

In many ways Naïve Realism is a justification for any position we hold which then allows us to declare that those who have different perspectives are completely out of touch with reality.

Naive realism is the ultimate tool for the closed-minded. Not only can it lead you into direct conflict with others it can lead into direct conflict with reality. You may have heard the expression “pride comes before a fall” and it is often accompanied by naïve realism.

The key to wisdom is being open-minded and not persuaded by your own propaganda. Of course, others will have different views than you but when you are prepared to respectfully listen and consider other perspectives you will be more empowered. When you're close-minded, you run the risk of being very emotional about your opinions and beliefs and it is the emotion that polarizes and alienates others, just as their emotions alienate you.

We don't need to weaponize opinions with high levels of emotion and all that goes with it. Can human beings know everything? How effective are we really at predicting the future? Is the human brain capable of complete knowledge and infallible predictive ability?

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WAYS TO AVOID NAIVE REALISM

1.

Make a commitment to consider alternative perceptions and views. You don't have to agree, but you need to consider different perspectives.

2.

Get your emotion out of the way. It can pull you vehemently in one direction and completely distort your perspective.

3.

Even when you are convinced your perception and decision-making is right, still consider other alternatives. Remember many issues are complex and often a binary simplicity is not helpful.

4.

Understand that there's a first time for everything. Just because something hasn't happened before – or apparently hasn't happened – that doesn't mean it can't happen now or at some point in the future. Naivety can arise from a very simplistic perception of events and an unwillingness to look beyond the first perceptions.

5.

Practice mindfulness to manage emotions and control your consciousness, by letting go of, and distancing yourself from, automatic emotional reactions.

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People with a fixed mindset are overconfident.

– Carol Dweck

Perhaps one of the more important biases refers to how biased we are about our biases. Naïve realism is the belief that we are completely rational and see the world as it really is, objectively and without any bias. To the naive realist the facts are obvious and anyone who disagrees with him is either uninformed, biased or irrational, or probably all three.

We are so convinced of our reality that it is easy to believe that ours is the only possible version. We need to understand that our perception and thought processes are fashioned by our individual experiences, which makes fervently believe that we are objective and that we know the reality. However, they are YOUR perceptions which may or may not reflect an objective truth and/or be shared by others.

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Naive Realism is a warning for all of us, but especially those in positions of making critical decisions. While we might feel we know what's going on, it's always best to be open-minded. It's hard for us to know when we're being especially naïve, and it's likely to come at times when we feel most assured about our judgments. So, ironically, with greater certainty comes the need for more open-mindedness.

Moreover, when we are convinced we are right, we will find more justification in finding fault with opposing or even different views using the confirmation bias. Our certainty needs to be defended at all costs. We will only see the evidence that supports us, and ignore or dismiss evidence that doesn't.

This means, ironically, that the more certain you are of an outcome or a decision, the more potential bias can creep in. On the other hand, if you are in doubt, you are more likely to be open-minded.

This naïve realism can be seen in your colleagues and team mates. If you're a leader, it is important to be aware of this possibility and find ways of encouraging open mindedness even when, especially when, a teammate or a group are highly confident. A useful tactic when feeling very confident, is to assume that your predictions and judgment turn out to be wrong.

Why did it go wrong?

What factors did you overlook?

What variables did you underestimate?

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What did you overestimate and why?

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Over-confidence is the way to give your soul to the devil an inch at a time.

– Joe R. Lansdale

Not only is this a useful practical exercise, the focus on failure will also likely help you realistically readjust your predictions if you have overvalued them. This exercise can also give you the basis of a contingency plan in the event your decision turns out to be not as successful as you had imagined.

It is reasonable to assume that people who are generally more open-minded and not so fixed in their thinking won't be subject to naïve realism. That's probably true in general but it doesn't mean that such a person will never get over confident, consciously or otherwise. We always have to be mindful about the possibility that we are overconfident even if that is an uncomfortable feeling.

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Overconfidence precedes carelessness.

– Toba Beta

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We're generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments.

– Daniel Kahneman

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MEDITATION

There's a difference between being confident and being over-confident. Over-confidence implies a degree of certainty that is not warranted. You might turn out to be right but never know how close you were to being wrong. This will almost certainly impact your confidence in future decisions.

While the accuracy of your judgments and decisions is important, your level of confidence in those judgments and decisions is also vital. Do you want luck or judgment to determine your ability to make the right call?

Over-confidence is the way to give your soul to the devil an inch at a time. You can be deceived by outcomes that hide the problems with your decision-making skills. Over confidence will eventually catch up with you.

Over confidence invites other biases, like confirmation bias and the availability bias that only feed an inflated sense of certainty and control. Be careful of feeling certain. The devil offers certainty, which is part of his appeal. Overconfidence breeds carelessness. There is doubt.

However, you want to address it rather than ignore it. Ignore it at your peril. We're generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments. Once we have made a decision, our minds work to confirm it is the right decision and look to minimize other possibilities.

You don't want to be naïve, you want to be realistic. You don't want to be careless, you want to be realistic. You don't want to be over-confident, you want to be careful. You don't want to sell your soul to the devil, you want to be thorough.

People with a fixed mindset are more likely to be overconfident. Don't have a fixed mindset, be flexible. A flexible mindset is protection against overconfidence. A flexible mindset is protection against carelessness. A flexible mindset is protection against the naïve realism bias. A flexible mindset is protection against many cognitive biases.

Great leaders are not overconfident. Great leaders don't have a fixed mindset. Great leaders appreciate a flexible mindset. Great leaders are not deceived by apparent certainty. Great leaders entertain doubt and deal with it rather than denying it. Great leaders understand the subtle possibilities of bias, especially naïve realism.

Over-confidence is the way to give your soul to the devil an inch at a time. We're generally overconfident in our opinions and our impressions and judgments. Overconfidence precedes carelessness. People with a fixed mindset are overconfident.