

Always Safe

How do mental shortcuts influence assessments and decisions?

Mental models and shortcuts help us understand and interpret information, make assessments, and take faster decisions. These systems are completely necessary to our functioning. For the most part, we make good and accurate assessments based on these models and shortcuts. On the other hand, it can lead to unconscious bias in the way we think, which can cause us to make mistakes.

SOME COMMON BIASES

We are more likely to notice and trust information that aligns with what we already think and believe.

We have a strong desire to reach agreement in discussions and focus more on concluding, than on considering the variation in viewpoints.

We often place more emphasis on input and evaluations from people who resemble ourselves – in appearance, characteristics, interests, values, expertise – over others.

We often choose alternatives that are familiar, or which resemble something we have seen before, rather than something that is new and unknown.

We have an excessive confidence in our own judgment, perceptions, and ideas, and underestimate the ideas, thoughts and suggestions of others

We often underestimate the amount of work, time and resources required to solve a task or complete a project.

How to counteract bias in assessments and decisions:

1. Seek input and thoughts from multiple sources. Include people with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and experiences, and involve those who will be affected by the decisions you make.
2. Set aside plenty of time to elicit thoughts, input, and experiences from all involved parties.
3. Pose open-ended questions that foster reflection and examine issues from various angles. Be critical and try to bring forth counterarguments and uncertainties.
4. Listen attentively to others' viewpoints and experiences and be curious about thoughts and opinions that differ from your own.
5. Verify if everyone has the same understanding by asking follow-up questions and restating your understanding of what has been said.
6. Evaluate: How was the process? Who was involved? Why? How conducive was the environment for challenging and sharing different perspectives?