



Diversity and Inclusion

Common Sources of Cognitive Errors

1. First Impressions – Our own personal values and preferences (and, of course, our learned stereotypes about certain groups can inordinately influence us to make fast and unexamined assumptions and even decisions about a person’s worth or appeal (*i.e., Well, that ponytail and those blue jeans clinched it for me, as soon as I saw him walk towards us. Clearly, that applicant is disrespecting us and still thinks he’s in graduate school. Another committee member responding to the same candidate, I got a kick out of the ponytail and jeans. I bet he’d be a sharp person for our...*).
2. Elitism – Involves feeling superior or wanting to feel superior; downgrading on the basis of the candidate’s undergraduate or doctoral campus, regional accent, dress, jewelry, social class, ethnic background, etc. (*i.e., Well, shouldn’t we always ask if a particular hire like Dewayne is likely to bolster our place in the business school ratings wars?...I mean, Dewayne’s scholarship is a bit out of the mainstream and could weaken us.*).
3. Raising the Bar – Involves raising requirements for a job or an award during the very process of evaluation (*i.e., Say, don’t we need more writing samples from LaTorya? I know we asked for only three articles from applicants. OK, hers are solid. But I’d feel better, to tell you the truth, if we had a few more in this particular case. I just want to be sure she’s really qualified.*).
4. Premature Ranking/Digging In – Rush to give numerical preferences to the applicants they are considering...rather than developing a pool of acceptable and qualified candidates and then comparing, contrasting, and mulling over candidates’ different strengths with one’s colleagues (*i.e., Well, I don’t want to waste time here in summarizing each candidate’s strengths and weaknesses, as the dean suggested. That seems to me just a useless writing exercise...I’ve got enough evidence to make up my mind about who should be number one, number two, and number three. I just hope we can hire number one and not be stuck with the others.*).
5. The Longing to Clone – When committee members under-value a candidate’s educational credentials and career trajectory simply because they are not the same as most of those on the evaluation committee (*i.e., Hey, have we ever chosen anyone with a doctorate from _____? We don’t know anything about that place. No one here ever went to that school, did they? No way.*).
6. Good Fit/Bad Fit – It is, of course, necessary for a candidate to be able to meet the agreed-on needs of the department, the students, the institution, and perhaps the community. Further, candidates being seriously scrutinized should possess the professional qualifications and competencies listed in the position description. But it is problematic when fit is stretched to mean: “Will I feel comfortable and culturally at ease with this new hire?” Or will I have to spend energy to learn some new ways to relate to this person?” (*i.e., Timothy will stick out in our department, as I’m sure everyone here senses. Won’t he be hard to relate to?*)

7. Provincialism – Undervaluing something outside your own province, circle, or clan. Trust only those letters of recommendation that are written by people they personally know (*i.e., Listen, I'm uneasy because I have never met this referee. I have a gut feeling that we shouldn't give his letter much credence. I just have no confidence in what is being said.*).
8. Extraneous Myths and Assumptions - Including “Psychoanalyzing” the Candidates – Personal opinions and misinformation should be suspect during evaluations. So too should second-guessing, mind-reading, or what I prefer to call “psychoanalyzing the candidate (*i.e., Jamaica is bound to be unhappy with our harsh winters...*)
9. Wishful Thinking; Rhetoric not Evidence – Not only holding to a notion in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary but also casually allowing this notion to cloud one’s cognitive processes (*i.e., There is absolutely no subjectivity or favoritism involved when we seek merit and excellence in candidates...; I don't see gender or race in people.*).
10. Self-Fulfilling Prophecy – Structuring our interaction with someone so that we can receive information congruent with our assumptions or so that we can avoid information incongruent with our assumptions. (*i.e., You believe the job candidate coming for an interview tomorrow is head and shoulders above all the other candidates. Consequently, you ask one of your most senior and well-informed colleagues to meet the candidate at the airport. Primed by this colleague, the candidate will be better prepared for issues he or she will face in the upcoming interviews and evaluation process.*).
11. Seizing a Pretext – creating a smoke screen to hide one’s real concerns or agenda (*i.e., Raquel seemed so nervous during the first five minutes of her job talk, Why keep her in the running?*).
12. Assuming Character over Context – *a decision-maker does not consider the particular context and any extenuating circumstances within that context but instead thinks automatically that an individual’s personal characteristics explain her or his behavior (i.e., You know, Sheila didn't seem very lively when I saw her after my 4 p.m. seminar. I don't think we want a low-energy person joining our team.)*. The committee person ignores the context that the interview is late in the day after a lengthy series of interviews for the applicant.
13. Momentum of the Group – If most members of an evaluation committee are favoring one candidate, then it will be more difficult for the remaining members to resist that push towards consensus. The remaining members will have to work harder to get full hearing for other candidates. Sometimes the struggle doesn’t seem worth the fight. (*i.e., Stop and think, Patrick. Doesn't it make you wonder why all the rest of us are behind Candidate A and you're the only holdout?*)

(Taken from Joann Moody’s *Faculty Diversity: Removing the Barriers*, 2012)