



CURBING CONFIRMATION BIAS

**A WEBINAR FOR SUPERVISORS FROM
YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

March 24, 2021



Federal
Occupational
Health

OBJECTIVES

- Define confirmation bias
- Review confirmation bias research and examples
- Discuss its relevance for supervisors
- Highlight tips to challenge confirmation bias

SECTION 1

CONFIRMATION BIAS: HOW AND WHY IT WORKS

COGNITIVE BIAS



Cognitive biases are the unconscious drivers that influence our judgment and decision-making



Biases are the invisible air we walk through and exert their influence outside of conscious awareness

CONFIRMATION BIAS



The tendency to seek and use information that reinforces our beliefs and avoid that which contradicts our personal views



HOW IT WORKS



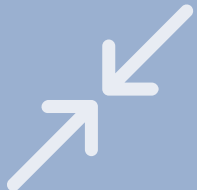
Filter information through the lens of our own experience



See certain facts and ideas as further confirmation of what we believe



Ignore or discount information that may be contrary to what we think



Neglect conflicting information as the process happens so quickly

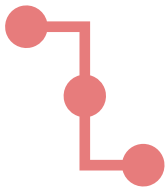
REASONS FOR CONFIRMATION BIAS



Wired to stick with what we know



Selective memory of supporting evidence



Efficient way to process information



Saves time when needing to make decisions

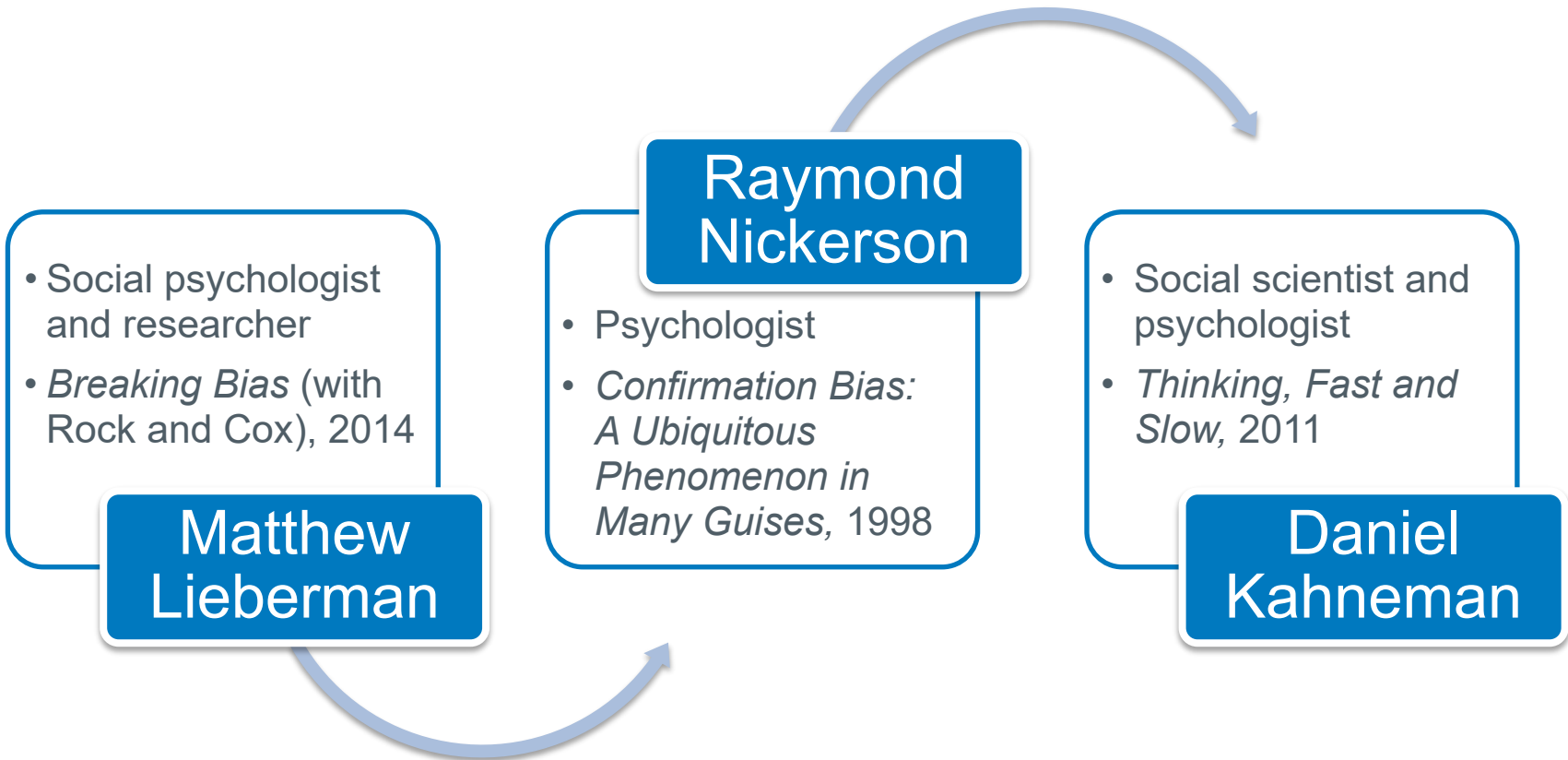


Makes the world conform to our expectations



Being right feels much better than being wrong

RESEARCH



EXAMPLES OF CONFIRMATION BIAS

General examples

Believing your opinion is always right and dismissing others' opinions as wrong

Basing investment choices on what's worked in the past without challenging your assessments

Sticking with the same brands when shopping without consideration that another might be cheaper or better

Assuming what your significant other will say in a conversation

EXAMPLES OF CONFIRMATION BIAS

Work-related examples

Making hiring decisions based on who's similar to the existing team

Relying only on instinct or intuition when making a decision

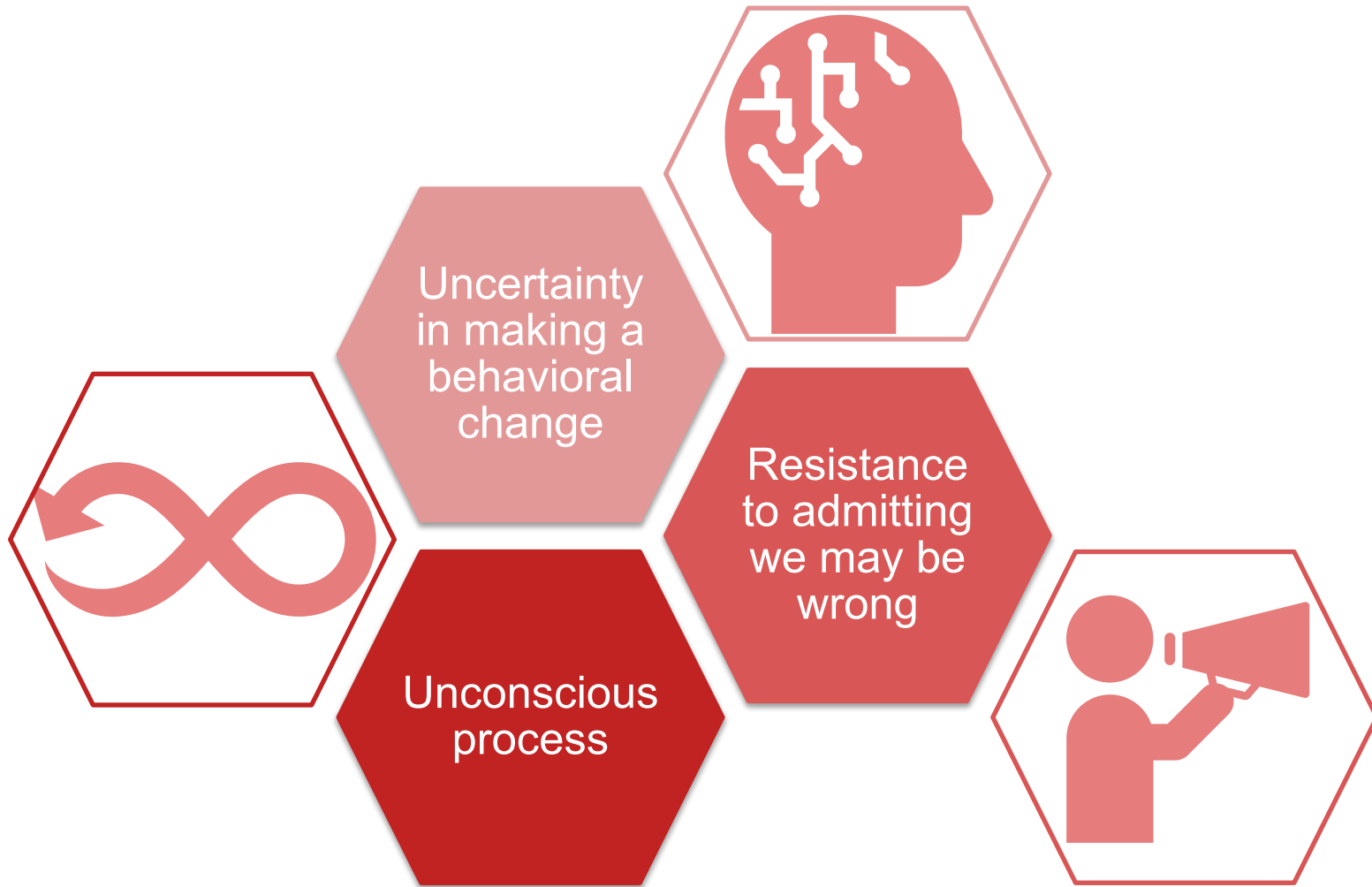
Consulting only with like-minded people before making a decision

Gathering data that supports the decision that's already been made

SECTION 2

SELF-INQUIRY

CHALLENGES





EXERCISE: FAST THINKING

Bring to mind an employee whose behavior you find challenging

- What specific behaviors bother you?



EXERCISE: FAST THINKING

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- What specific behaviors bother you?
- How do you generally react when interacting with that individual?



EXERCISE: FAST THINKING

Bring to mind an employee whose behavior you find challenging

- What specific behaviors bother you?
- How do you generally react when interacting with that individual?
 - Do you tune them out?
 - Do you experience tension in your body?
 - Do you feel frustrated, defeated, angry?
 - Do you strategize your response while they're talking?



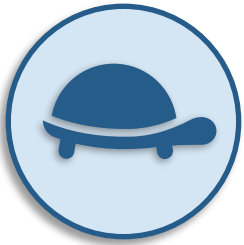
EXERCISE: SLOW THINKING

Take a moment to breathe and reset.



Now consider:

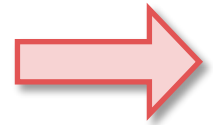
– Has this individual ever surprised you?

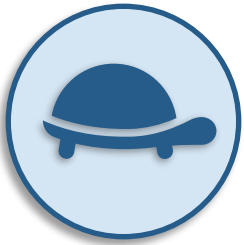


POLL: SLOW THINKING

Has this individual ever done something that contradicted what you expected?

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.

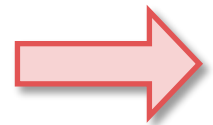




POLL: SLOW THINKING

Might there be other possible explanations or interpretations of this individual's behavior?

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



SECTION 3

**CURBING
CONFIRMATION
BIAS: IT'S A
PROCESS**

READINESS

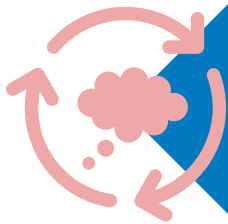


To help identify instances where your confirmation bias emerges, consider these questions:

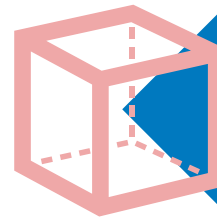
- Am I willing to look at how my beliefs may limit my decision-making?
- Am I willing to admit I may have rushed to judgment about something or someone?
- Am I willing to look for where my confirmation biases are entering the picture?
- Am I willing to take steps toward changing my own behavior?

SELF-AWARENESS

Assess past behavior and look for patterns



Pay attention to automatic thoughts and behaviors

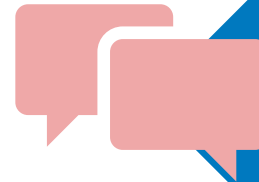
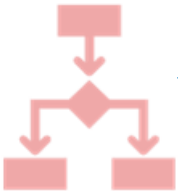


Look for instances of all-or-nothing statements

- Note the times when you say “never” or “always”

Notice how you:

- Take in information that’s consistent with what you already believe
- Ignore or dismiss information that challenges your beliefs



Check in with a trusted mentor or peer

- Ask about their perceptions of you and your behavior patterns

SELF-AWARENESS: REFLECT AND LEARN

*“People generally see what they look for,
and hear what they listen for.”*

– Harper Lee, Author
To Kill a Mockingbird

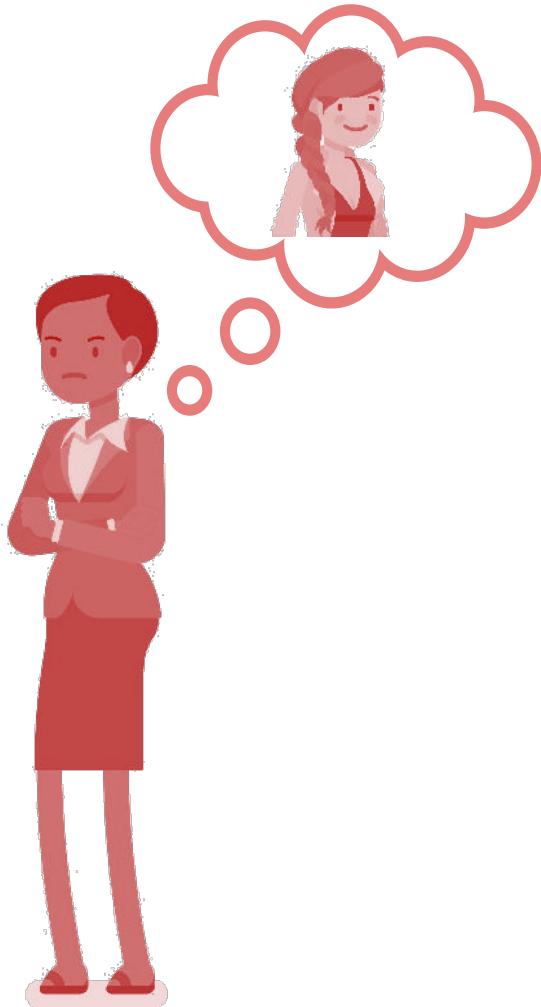
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF



To assess whether and how you are challenging your confirmation bias, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I asking myself the tough questions?
- Can I identify my preconceptions?
- Do I listen when employees confirm or challenge my perspective?
- Do I spend time listening to opposing points of view?
- Have I looked for evidence to disprove what I believe?

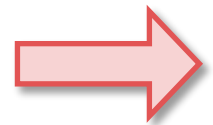
EXERCISE



POLL

I was able to better understand the employee's position:

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF



These questions are helpful as you work to break out of the self-reinforcing bubble:

- Do my usual sources confirm or challenge my perspective?
- When making decisions, do I generally choose the option that those closest to me will affirm?
- Is my team just giving me information I want to hear?
- How might others perceive my confirmation biases?

TIPS

Seek out and understand information that contradicts your beliefs

Slow down the process; chunk it down and examine each step to assess your logic

Get an outside opinion from a peer, supervisor, or mentor

Consider input from staff

Eliminate snap judgments

Collaborate when making decisions

MORE TIPS

Training your brain can lead to more thoughtful decision-making

Use emotional intelligence competencies

Develop emotional self-control

Cultivate empathy to see things from another's perspective

Be aware of the power dynamics within the organization and your team

Tolerate conflict and help others find common ground

Practice mindfulness techniques

Start by noticing when you're distracted and then deliberately refocus

Repeat as often as necessary

SELF-REFLECTION EXERCISE



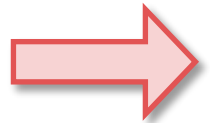
Consider these questions about today's material:

- What did I automatically agree with?
- What parts did I disagree with or ignore?
- How did I react overall to this information?
- Overall, did this information conflict with or confirm what I believe?

POLL

Overall, the information presented today:

Select an answer from the polling panel, then click **Submit**.



CONFIRMATION BIAS IS EVERYWHERE

- There's no right or wrong answer to the poll question
- Either answer is a takeoff point for self-awareness and contemplation.
 - Whether the information conflicted with or coincided with your beliefs, **challenge yourself about what you believe!**
- Remember that even when we do our best to counteract our own confirmation bias, it may still be present and flare up unconsciously



SUMMARY

- Accept that confirmation bias is a pervasive and unconscious process
- Understand that it provides an efficient way to evaluate information
- Recognize how it can result in poor decision-making
- Pay scrupulous attention and note your own tendency to use this bias
- Actively seek information to challenge your beliefs
- Use emotional intelligence competencies to combat confirmation bias
- Cultivate a workplace culture that values collaboration in decision-making

FINAL THOUGHTS



RESOURCES

Books

- *What Makes a Leader: Why Emotional Intelligence Matters*
 - D. Goleman, 2014
- *Thinking, Fast and Slow*
 - D. Kahneman, 1994

Articles

- *Beyond Bias*
 - strategy-business.com/article/00345?gko=d11ee
- *Confirmation Bias and the Power of Disconfirming Evidence*
 - fs.blog/2017/05/confirmation-bias
- *How to Avoid Confirmation Bias at Work*
 - mindful.org/how-to-avoid-confirmation-bias-at-work
- *Root Out Bias From Your Decision-Making Process*
 - hbr.org/2017/03/root-out-bias-from-your-decision-making-process
- *The Cognitive Biases Tricking Your Brain*
 - theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/09/cognitive-bias/565775

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