

Rising above Cognitive Errors

Guidelines for Search, Tenure Review, and Other Evaluation Committees

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I. Common Errors of Individual Members

Not errors just made by the 'bad guys' but things we all tend to do if we are not motivated to avoid them.

1. **Negative Stereotypes.** "A stereotype can be defined as a broad generalization about a particular group and the presumption that a member of the group embodies the generalized traits of that group." Negative stereotypes are negative presumptions such as presumptions of incompetence in an area, or presumptions of lack of character or trustworthiness.
2. **Positive Stereotypes.** A halo effect where members of a group are presumed to be competent or bonafide. Such a member receives the benefit of the doubt. Positive achievements are noted more than negative performance, and success is assumed.
3. **Raising the Bar.** Related to negative stereotypes, when we require members of certain groups to prove that they are not incompetent by using more filters or higher ones for them.
4. **Elitism.** Wanting to feel superior through certain attributes or selectivity that highlights how we characterize more positive stereotypes (accents, schools, dress, ratings).
5. **First Impressions.** Drawing conclusions in a matter of seconds based on our personal likes/dislikes.
6. **The Longing to Clone.** Devaluing someone who is not like most of 'us' on the committee, or wanting someone to resemble, in attributes, someone we admire and are replacing.
7. **Good Fit/Bad Fit.** While it may be about whether the person can meet the programmatic needs for the position, it often is about how comfortable and culturally at ease we will feel.
8. **Provincialism.** Similar to cloning, this is undervaluing something outside your own province, circle, or clan. For example, trusting only reference letters from people you know.
9. **Extraneous Myths and Assumptions.** Undermining the careful collection and analysis of information, such as we can't get a person like that to come here, or we have all of them we need.
10. **Wishful Thinking.** Opinions rather than facts and evidence. Examples are assumptions that we, and certain other institutions, run on objective meritocracy, or we are colorblind.
11. **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.** Some call it 'channeling,' where we structure our interaction with someone so we can receive information congruent with our assumptions, or avoid information incongruent with our assumptions.
12. **Seizing a Pretext.** Hiding one's real concern or agenda (e.g., excessive weight) behind something trivial, or focusing on a few negatives rather than the overall performance.
13. **Character over Context, or Attribution errors.** For example, failing to recognize the context of a situation—was it social, late in the day, outside of the professional arena, or an attribution of responsibility for a situation that is misplaced on one person rather than others.
14. **Premature Ranking/Digging In.** Rush to use numbers, as if they are objective, to drive a decision.
15. **Momentum of the Group.** It is difficult to resist consensus when the majority seems to be heading one way without a full hearing on other considerations.

II. Organizational Dysfunctions *that exacerbate cognitive errors.*

1. **Overloading and Rushing.** Undertaking complex tasks without appropriate time, resources, or relief from other loads.
2. **No Coaching or Practice.** No training in searching and interviewing practices, so people default to what they have seen or experienced before.
3. **No Ground Rules.** Before filtering applicants, have we established the needs and priorities for the program? How the committee will function, process and help each other? Gathered information on who else they can call upon?
4. **Absence of Reminders and Monitoring.** For example, reminders of common errors, highest priorities, and a process monitor on the committee.
5. **No One is Accountable.** No updates or disclosure is required.
6. **Lack of Debriefing for Systematic Improvement.** Committees start from scratch over and over again.

III. Rising above Cognitive Errors *Remedies for Dysfunctions*

1. Clear intentions by individuals to avoid errors. Dialogue followed by visual reminders and intentional checks for errors in every stage.
2. Coaching, preparation, reminders. Toolkits and workshops before process begins, chair coaching and equity advisors
3. Ground Rules and Preparation for Process- set out problems of past and establish ground rules to avoid these and sharing of lessons learned from past efforts
4. Non-voting process person for Quality Control- to avoid unintentional contaminants
5. Use a visual matrix to stay focused on agreed upon evaluation and evidence to consider
6. Slow down, don't overload, and provide appropriate assistance
7. Incorporate Accountability- whether to administration or constituents
8. Gather and highlight non-stereotypical evidence (not raising the bar though)
9. Avoid rush to numerical ranking - filter not ranking
10. Avoid solo situations
11. Practice
12. Personal Relations to Diminish Social Distance
13. Courage and Leadership to insist on evidence being shown
14. Constant attention to improvement debriefings.