

Prejudices are what
fools use for reason.

**MY SUCCESS IS YOUR
SUCCESS**

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Voltaire.
(1694 – 1778)
French major figure in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, Anglomaniac, keen on arts and sciences, Voltaire left his mark on his era through his literary production and his political commitments. Its influence is decisive on the wealthy liberal classes before the French Revolution and during the beginning of the 19th century.

MY SUCCESS IS YOUR
SUCCESS
Questions, Reflections & Answers

Strategies to enhance your self
potential and that of those around you
to reach the success you
deserve.

Germain Decelles

THE COGNITIVE BIAS

You need to make an unbiased and rational decision about something important. You do your research, make pros and cons lists, consult with experts and trusted friends. When it comes time to decide, will your decision really be objective!

Maybe not, because it's because you're analyzing information using the complex cognitive machine that is your brain that has processed your every life experience.

During your life, like any other person, you have developed some subtle cognitive biases. These aspects and perspectives influence what information you pay attention to, what you remember about past decisions, and what sources you decide to trust when researching your options.

A. What is cognitive bias?

A cognitive bias is a flaw in your reasoning that leads you to misinterpret information from the world around you to arrive at an inaccurate conclusion.

Because you're inundated with information from millions of sources throughout the day, your brain develops filing systems to decide what information deserves your attention and what information is important enough to store in memory.

It also creates shortcuts intended to reduce the time it takes to process information.

The problem is that shortcuts and ranking systems aren't always perfectly objective, as their architecture is uniquely tailored to your life experiences.



B. What are the most common types of cognitive biases?

Researchers have cataloged over 175 cognitive biases.

Here are some of the more familiar ones that can affect your daily life:

1. *Actor-observer bias*: actor-observer bias is a difference between how we explain the actions of others and how we explain our own.

People tend to say that another person did something because of the distinctive marks of their character or some other internal factor. In contrast, people usually attribute their own actions to external factors such as the circumstances they were in at the time.

2. *Anchoring bias*: anchoring bias is the tendency to rely heavily on the first information you learn when evaluating something. In other words, what you learn at the start of an investigation often has a greater impact on your judgment than information you learn later.

3. *Attentional Bias*: attentional bias probably evolved in humans as a survival mechanism. To survive, humans must dodge or avoid threats. Among the millions of pieces of information that bombard the senses daily, they must identify those that could be important for their health, happiness, and safety.

This highly adapted survival skill can become biased if you start to focus your attention too much on one type of information, while neglecting other types of information.

4. *Availability heuristic*: a heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows people to solve problems and make judgments quickly and efficiently. This experiential and observational thinking shortens decision-making time and allows people to function without constantly stopping to think about their next course of action.

However, there are both pros and cons of heuristics. While heuristics are useful in many situations, they can also lead to cognitive biases. For example, if you can immediately think of several facts that support a judgment, you might be inclined to think that judgment is correct.

Another common bias is the tendency to give more credit to ideas that come easily to mind. When information is readily available around you, you are more likely to remember it.

Easily accessible information in your memory seems more reliable. For example, if a person sees several headlines about shark attacks in a coastal area, that person may think that the risk of shark attacks is higher than it is.

5. *Validation bias*: similarly, people tend to seek out and interpret information in ways that confirm what they already believe. Validation bias causes people to ignore or invalidate information that conflicts with their beliefs.



This trend seems more prevalent than ever, as many people get their news from social media, which follows and searches for « likes, » which provides information based on your apparent preferences.

6. *Overestimation bias*: a cognitive bias whereby people with limited knowledge or skill in a given intellectual or social area grossly overestimate their own knowledge or skill in that area relative to objective criteria or the performance of their peers or people in general.

7. *False, consensus effect*: just as people sometimes overestimate their own skills, they also overestimate the degree to which others agree with their judgments and approve of their behaviors.

People tend to think of their own beliefs and actions as familiar, while the behaviors of others are more deviant or unusual.

An interesting note: false beliefs based on consensus are appearing in many cultures around the world.

8. *Functional fixity*: this is a type of cognitive bias that involves a tendency to view objects or people as only functioning in a particular way.

When you see a hammer, you probably think of it as a tool for hammering nail heads. This function is what hammers were designed for, so the brain effectively affixes the function to the word or image of a hammer.

But functional fixity does not only apply, to tools. People can develop a sort of functional fixity with other human beings, especially in work environments.

For example, Hannah = IT and Alex = Marketing.

The problem with functional fixity is that it can strictly limit creativity and problem solving. In many cases, functional fixity can prevent people from seeing the full range of uses for an object and the people around them. It can also impair our ability to find new solutions to problems.

9. *Aureole effect*: refers to the tendency to allow a specific trait or our general impression of a person, company, or product to positively influence our judgment of their other related traits.

If you are under the influence of a halo effect, your overall impression of a person is unduly shaped and influenced by a single characteristic, such as beauty. People regularly perceive attractive people as more intelligent and conscientious than their actual performance indicates.

10. *Misinformation Effect*: when you remember an event, your perception of it may be altered if you later receive false information about the event.

In other words, if you learn something new about an event you saw, it may change how you remember it, even if what you are told is unrelated or wrong. This form of bias has enormous implications for the validity of testimonies.



So, if the witnesses to the event practice repeating statements about themselves, especially those that focus on the strength of their judgment and memory, the effects of the misinformation diminish, and they tend to remember events more accurately.

Refer to Mark R. Levin's book (Unfreedom of the Press – ISBN 978-1-4767-7309-4) to understand the role of the press in misinforming the public.

11. *Optimism bias*: an optimism bias can make you believe that you are less likely to encounter difficulties than others and more likely to experience success.

Whether people are making predictions about their future wealth, relationships, or health, they typically overestimate success and underestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes.

This is because we update our beliefs selectively, adding an update when something is going well, but less often when things are going wrong.

12. *Selfish Bias*: when something goes wrong in your life, you may tend to blame an outside force for causing it.

But when something goes wrong in someone else's life, you may wonder if that person was in some way blamed, if some internal characteristic or flaw caused their problem.

In the same way, a selfish bias can lead you to credit your own internal qualities or habits when something good comes your way.

C. How does cognitive bias affect you?

Cognitive biases can affect your decision-making abilities, limit your problem-solving abilities, hamper your career success, affect the reliability of your memories, challenge your ability to react in crisis, increase anxiety and depression and damage your relationships.

D. Can cognitive biases be avoided?

Probably not. The human mind seeks efficiency, which means that much of the reasoning we used to conduct our day-to-day decision-making relies on near-automatic processing.

But researchers believe we can better recognize the situations in which our biases are likely to operate and take steps to uncover and correct them.

Studying cognitive biases can help you recognize them in your own life and counter them once you identify them.

Here's how to mitigate the effects of bias:

1. *Learn*: studying cognitive biases can help you recognize them in your own life and counter them once you identify them.



2. **Ask questions:** if you're in a situation where you know you might be susceptible to bias, slow down your decision-making and consider expanding the range of trusted sources you consult.
3. **Collaborate:** bring together a diverse group of contributors with different areas of expertise and life experience to help you envision possibilities you might otherwise overlook.
4. **Remain blind:** to reduce the risk of being influenced by gender, race, or other easily stereotyped considerations, restrict yourself from accessing information about these factors. It would also be nice to suggest others do the same.
5. **Use checklists, algorithms, and other objective measures:** they can help you focus on relevant factors and reduce the likelihood that you will be influenced by irrelevant factors.

Cognitive biases are flaws in your way of thinking that can cause you to draw inaccurate conclusions.

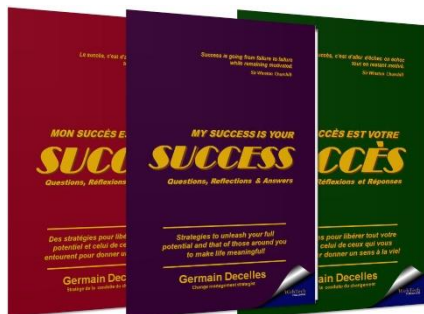
They can be harmful because they cause you to focus too much on certain types of information while neglecting other types.

It's probably unrealistic to think that you can eliminate cognitive bias, but you can improve your ability to spot situations in which you'll be vulnerable to it.

By learning more about how they work, slowing down your decision-making process, collaborating with others, and using checklists and objective processes, you can reduce the chances of cognitive bias leading you astray.

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About the Author

In addition to writing, Germain Decelles acts as Change Management Strategist. He has over 40 years of business and consultation experience with local and international markets, including sectors such as retail trade, distribution, information technology and communications, transportation, manufacturing, financial services, and government organizations.



Other publications: ISO Pour Tous – Le manuel d’information ISO – Le guide de préparation ISO – La gestion du changement en affaires – La gestion de projet d’affaires – Le changement POUR TOUS – Change your future, now! – Mon succès est votre succès.

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Press Contact



Germain Decelles, o.s.j.
WebTech Management and Publishing Incorporated
514-575-3427
gdecelles@webtechmanagement.com

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