When dealing with uncertainty at work, we rely on strategies like playing to **cultural norms**, leaning on the **concreteness of our past experience**, **comparing** options, and **simplifying** decision-making through prioritization or streamlining. *But these very useful strategies can inadvertently introduce biases into our decisions and actions.*

In addition to the four tendencies that can both help—and hinder—our ability to make decisions under uncertainty, the nature of organizational decisions fall into two broad categories: **Definition of value** v. choosing a **path forward**.

Decisions about **value and how to define it** are more grounded in a point in time, with the goal of assessing past-, present- or future tense value of something, either singly or across a set.

These kinds of judgments are often oriented around evaluating and prioritizing static elements: for example, deciding which interviewee to hire, or deciding which project to pursue when faced constrained by limited resources.

But they also come into play when assessing what "good" looks like more generally. Making assumptions about what matters or what feels normal can artificially limit the breadth of alternatives under consideration, or who gets to participate in making choices.

NORMS

"The way we do things around here" exerts an enormous influence on actions, but also on what we perceive as "normal" and how we think about our identity... whether we're part of the in-group or the out. A set of norms provides the *context* for actions, which is often hidden in plain sight if it's the only one you know.

PEOPLE EMBRACE DIFFERENT ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES, EXPERIENCES, AND CONTEXT

The assumption of shared value and similarity in work environments can both blind us to legitimate differences or heighten feelings of being outside the norm (*Rivalry bias*)—e.g. designers might feel extra "designery" in a room of technical folks, or being the only woman can heighten feelings of representing "the woman's perspective" rather than simply "my perspective"— and can also reinforce the sense that everyone knows what they know, which is never the case (*Expertise bias*).

RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT IS "NORMAL" TO ONE PERSON IS MERELY THE RESULT OF IT HAVING BEEN TRUE FOR THEM, NOT THAT IT'S A NATURAL STATE FOR EVERYONE

SHARE "DAY IN THE LIFE" PERSPECTIVES TO BUILD AWARENESS AND EMPATHY FOR OTHERS' SITUATIONS, AND PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY INTO WHAT INFORMS CHOICES OR BEHAVIORS

ORGANIZATIONS ARE OPTIMIZED TO MAINTAIN EXISTING BEHAVIORS THROUGH PROCESSES, INCENTIVE SYSTEMS, AND SOCIAL NORMS

Organizations benefit from having clear and efficient processes and structures... but because humans are "effort averse," this makes it more difficult to instill new habits or behaviors (*Anchoring, Status quo bias*)

QUESTION INDIVIDUAL NORMS TO IDENTIFY WHERE HIERARCHY OR STRUCTURE REINFORCES EXISTING DOMINANT CULTURE

MAKE GOALS CLEAR AND ACTIVELY REWARD NEW BEHAVIORS

SENIOR LEADERS HAVE AN INFLATED SENSE OF OWNERSHIP, INVESTMENT, AND AGENCY

Ownership and investment in things provides a powerful pull: building or making things—even intangible ones, like making decisions—tends to imbue them with outsize meaning and importance to us that we assume others share (*Developer's curse, IKEA effect, Endowment effect*). Spoiler: they don't.

CLARIFY HOW BUSINESS GOALS RELATE TO NON-LEADERS, TO AVOID ASSUMPTIONS OF ALIGNMENT WHERE IT DOES NOT EXIST

RECOGNIZE WHERE "LEADER BIAS" LEADS TO HEIGHTENED INVESTMENT, AND A CONFLATION OF BUSINESS GOALS WITH PERSONAL GOALS THAT MAY NOT HOLD TRUE FOR OTHERS

CREATE A SENSE OF AGENCY AND GENUINE SUPPORT ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF THE ORGANIZATION

IDEAS ABOUT "WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE" MAY NOT BE SHARED BY EVERYONE

The work, social, and cultural environments within which we spend time tend to feel genuine and natural to us, but may be perceived as strange, or even threatening, to those on the outside or who experience them for the first time.

RECOGNIZE THAT FAMILIARITY MAY OVER-INFLUENCE INTERPRETATION OR BEHAVIOR

ALIGN ON DESIRED ATTRIBUTES OR GOALS IN ADVANCE

BE DELIBERATE IN GAUGING HOW INDIVIDUALS' SKILLS WILL MEET INTENDED GOALS, RATHER THAN JUDGING BY THE PACKAGE THEY COME IN OR WHAT YOU ARE ACCUSTOMED TO

TASKS THAT ARE REQUIRED, OR REQUESTED BY OTHERS, FEEL LESS IMPORTANT THAN MY "REAL WORK"

Things that have enormous value for one person or part of an organization may have little value for another (*Value exchange*).

PROVIDE INCREASED CLARITY ABOUT THE "WHY" BEHIND THE "WHAT" TO INCREASE A SHARED SENSE OF UNDERSTANDING AND POTENTIAL WILLINGNESS TO HELP

WORK CULTURE IS A STRONG DRIVING FORCE BEHIND BEHAVIOR... BUT THIS CAN LEAD TO ASSUMPTIONS THAT EVERYONE SHARES THE SAME VALUES, OR THAT COMPANY GOALS ARE ALIGNED WITH ALL INDIVIDUALS' SENSE OF IDENTITY

CONCRETENESS

The ability to express abstract notions is a handy skill, but effective communication and interpretation often relies on providing concrete examples. Vivid, memorable, recent, and concrete stories — in other words, with heightened *availability* — carry more than their fair share of weight when it comes to information recall.

WE MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE (E.G. THEIR SKILLS OR RANK) BASED ON A NARROW READ OF SURFACE ATTRIBUTES

We often carry subconscious mental models about what *seems* right simply based on what we've been exposed to (*Clustering biases, Implicit biases, Representativeness*). Although these may feel benign, they biases can reinforce inequity and reduce peoples' effectiveness when those assumptions require constant correction (*Identity ambiguity*).

TEST JUDGMENTS WITH THE QUESTION "IF SOMEONE ELSE TALKED OR ACTED LIKE THAT, WOULD I FEEL DIFFERENTLY"

ELICIT AND COLLECT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES WHEN THEY ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY RELEVANT

STAY ALERT TO IDEAS FROM FURTHER AFIELD THAT MAY PROVIDE NEW LENSES OR INSPIRATION

TINA KIEFER (PROFESSOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK) ASKED PEOPLE TO "DRAW A LEADER"... NEARLY ALL THE RESULTING IMAGES WERE MALE.
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/16/health/women-leadership-workplace.html

LACK OF EXAMPLES OR MODELING LEAD TO PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS OF "WHAT COULD BE"

Our tendency to put vivid, recent, or personal examples front of mind (*Availability*) puts new ideas at an extra disadvantage, since our sense of what's possible is heavily shaped by what we've been exposed to in the past.

ACTIVELY DEMONSTRATE BETTER BEHAVIORS AS A MODEL FOR OTHERS (I.E. DON'T ASK WOMEN TO GO GET THE COFFEE)

PERSONAL HISTORIES OF PATTERN RECOGNITION FEEL MORE RELIABLE THAN OTHER'S PERSPECTIVES

Not surprisingly, our own personal history is robust, rich, and full of useful detail... but this can make other perspectives feel lightweight and easily dismissed by comparison.

ELICIT CONCRETE EXAMPLES FROM OTHERS RATHER THAN ASSUMING ONE'S PERSONAL MENTAL MODELS ARE DE FACTO CORRECT

PEOPLE OR THINGS INHERIT PERCEPTIONS BY ASSOCIATION WITH THINGS WE ALREADY KNOW

We often assume that things we associate with play out exactly the same way (*Representativeness*)... this can be especially dangerous when our assumptions paint an overly rosy picture (*Halo effect*), as we are more likely to be disappointed if we end up feeling let down.

PLAY OUT WHERE GUILT (OR HALO) BY ASSOCIATION ASSUMPTIONS MAY BACKFIRE TO INTRODUCE A MORE LOGICAL MINDSET

WE SEE WHAT WE WANT TO SEE, AND DISREGARD THINGS THAT DON'T FIT

We are not as even-handed in weighing information as we like to think... we tend to be more open to cues, signals, and content that reinforces our world view or bolsters what we already know (*Confirmation bias*).

SUPPLEMENT OR QUESTION GO-TO SOURCES/PROCESSES FOR GATHERING INFORMATION

COLLECT EXAMPLES TO BROADEN PERSPECTIVES

USE "DE-BIASING" TOOLS LIKE CHECKLISTS TO ADD OBJECTIVITY

WE REDUCE PEOPLE TO THE QUALITIES WE'RE MOST FAMILIAR WITH

Our assumptions about who people are or what they do is framed by what we've seen them do in the past (*Anchoring*), which can limit how we perceive their future potential.

MAKE SKILL DEVELOPMENT GOALS CONCRETE TO AVOID LEAVING IT TO CHANCE

LOOK BEYOND ACTIVITIES THAT ARE NEEDED NOW TO THOSE THAT WILL BE USEFUL IN THE FUTURE

WEIGH SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM SOURCES OF VALUE (I.E. INVESTMENT IN CAREER ARC V. SMALL CONTRIBUTIONS TODAY)

BE DELIBERATE ABOUT GETTING REINFORCING EVIDENCE

BRING IN ALTERNATE POINTS OF VIEW TO AVOID JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

SORTING AND CATEGORIZING NEW INPUTS INTO BUCKETS HELPS US QUICKLY MAKE SENSE OF NEW OPTIONS... BUT WE TEND TO OVERWEIGHT OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND WHAT FEELS FAMILIAR WHEN DOING SO

COMPARISONS

Although we may assume we can gauge value absolutely, we actually tend to judge items relatively, making comparisons in order to determine their worth. This shows up in our tendency toward *anchoring*: using one value — which may be set deliberately, or even arbitrarily — as a starting point.

INEQUITY IS REINFORCED BY EXISTING IMBALANCES WITHIN A SYSTEM

We tend to assume that systems are agnostic, but long-standing systemic biases are baked into what we see as just "the way things are" (*Anchoring*).

LOOK FOR AND CORRECT PAST INEQUITY (E.G. WOMEN ENTERING WITH A LOWER SALARY HISTORY LEADS TO LOWER OVERALL COMPENSATION)

USE OBJECTIVE OR EXTERNAL MARKERS TO TEST ASSUMPTIONS

TITLES OR ROLES ARE CONSIDERED IN A VACUUM

We perceive things relative to one another (*Prospect theory*) and recognize where we stand based on comparative examples (*Anchoring*). For examples, titles may not be that meaningful in isolation... but when the person who used to be at your level is now a VP while you're a manager, or the top dog in the room only speaks to you if you're a partner, suddenly it makes a big difference

RECOGNIZE WHEN TITLES OR RELATIVE RANK MIGHT CREATE MORE TENSION THAN EXPECTED

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL WHEN TITLES ARE LIKELY TO INFORM BEHAVIOR

PEOPLE ASSUME THEY ARE ABOVE AVERAGE

Depending on the study, 70-80% of drivers think they are above average (*Overconfidence bias*)... but without a gauge to know what average actually looks like, it's hard to blame the 25% who are only fooling themselves (as they forget to use their turn signals)

PROVIDE EXAMPLES TO INDICATE WHAT GOOD, BAD, AND AVERAGE LOOK LIKE TO PROVIDE TRUER, SHARED REFERENCE POINTS

SEEK OUT OR PROVIDE FEEDBACK FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES (BOTTOM-UP OR 360) TO PROVIDE A MORE ACCURATE SENSE OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

EMBEDDED NORMS OF WHO TAKES ON CERTAIN ROLES OR GETS STRETCH ASSIGNMENTS

Embedded assumptions about what types of people tend to be good at (*Implicit biases*) show up in implicit expectations, such as the implicit assumption that Mary should plan the holiday party while Bill is "just kind of bad" at mentoring but gets plum, high profile assignments.

RECOGNIZE WHEN CERTAIN PEOPLE GET ROLES BECAUSE THEY ARE DEEMED RELIABLE AT WHAT THEY HAVE DONE IN THE PAST, WHILE OTHERS GET ROLES BASED ON POTENTIAL

CREATE EXPLICIT MECHANISMS TO COMPARE AND ASSIGN WHO DOES WHAT, TO MORE FAIRLY DISTRIBUTE AND EVALUATE BEHAVIOR AND REDUCE "EXPLAINING AWAY" IMBALANCED EXPECTATIONS

PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERING DEGREES OF AGENCY OR THE ABILITY TO SAY NO

Typically, higher-ranking roles in organizations have more agency and control over what to do and how to do it; when that is your normal, it can be hard to remember what it's like to be on the receiving end of assignments with little control over what, when, and how work gets done (*Actor/observer effect*).

BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT WHERE DISPARITIES OF RANK MAY INFORM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON FEELINGS OF AGENCY, OR OWNERSHIP OVER THE WORK

DETERMINING THE MERITOCRATIC VALUE OF INDIVIDUAL DECISIONS, OUTCOMES, OR WHAT PEOPLE ARE WORTH FEELS EQUITABLE ...BUT WE TEND TO COMPARE THINGS RELATIVE TO OTHERS MORE THAN WE DO ABSOLUTELY

SIMPLIFICATION

The sheer amount of information available to us is staggering... so it's no wonder that our brains crave ways to simplify the amount of cognitive processing we need to do. One way in which we manage this overload is *representativeness*: assuming that a few characteristics stand in for larger truths.

PROJECTS AND SALES ARE WELL-DEFINED, DISCRETE UNITS THAT BRING IN CONCRETE VALUE (I.E. REVENUE), SO THEY ARE OFTEN EMPHASIZED OVER CAREER PLANNING AND MENTORING

WE FOCUS ON THE PARTS THAT MAKE THE MOST SENSE TO US, RATHER THAN THE WHOLE

Our brains are just better at seeing parts more than the whole —"now" outweighs the future, what's important to me crowds out inconsequential details — but we also tend to focus on the "frame" that is most directly related to the work we are responsible for (*Unit of analysis biases*).

ZOOM OUT TO SEE THE WHOLE VIEW AND POTENTIAL ROOT CAUSES

AVOID GETTING INTO THE HABIT OF LONGER-TERM PRIORITIES ALWAYS LOSING OUT TO SHORTER-TERM ONES (E.G. STAFFING A PROJECT WINS OUT OVER CAREER PLANNING)

WE PRIORITIZE CONCRETE, SHORT-TERM, AND EASILY MEASURED OUTCOMES AND REWARDS OVER ABSTRACT ONES

"Be innovative!" sounds great, and may get people excited, but when it's a choice between taking a risk to do something unproven (*Risk-aversion*) v. sticking with the usual (*Status quo bias*) and getting a predictable reward (*Reward bias*), chances are high they will go with the latter.

TAKE A HARD LOOK AT WHAT IS MEASURED... AND WHAT IS LEFT OUT OF WHAT VALUE IS NOT CAPTURED

DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF NEW OR INTANGIBLE BENEFITS, OR OTHERWISE MAKE THEM MORE CLEAR

REWARD OR RECOGNIZE NEW OR RISKY BEHAVIORS TO INCREASE CHANCES OF PEOPLE DOING THEM

THE FAMILIAR IS OFTEN REWARDED OVER THE UNFAMILIAR

The more familiar something is, the more likely we are to have go-to assumptions about its value (*Representativeness*)... or even that it is worth something at all.

INCREASE AWARENESS OF SITUATIONS WHEN "JUST LIKE ME" ASSUMPTIONS INORDINATELY REWARD THE SAME OLD/SAME OLD

FOCUS ON DEVELOPING BROADER OR LONGER-TERM VIEWS ON HOW TO DEFINE VALUE

WE ARE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND IN THE "RIGHT" WAY WHEN WE KNOW IT COUNTS

Just knowing they are being observed makes people take more effort (*Hawthorne effect*), but traditional top-down performance management processes often reward "managing up" behaviors at the expense of developing junior talent, and people tend to focus their energy where they know they are likely to be rewarded (*Reward bias*).

RECOGNIZE WHEN PEOPLE PUT IN HIGH PROFILE EFFORT AT THE EXPENSE OF ACTIVITIES OF "LESSER" IMPORTANCE

BALANCE TENDENCIES TO "MANAGE UP" WITH A MORE HOLISTIC VIEW OF DEVELOPING PEOPLE

LACK OF GUIDELINES, CRITERIA, OR MODELING SIGNAL WHICH SKILLS ARE SEEN AS LOW PRIORITY

Seeing good models for desired behavior — as well as seeing people rewarded for it — can increase the belief that it is a desirable thing to do (*Social proof*).

PROVIDE SUPPORT AND STRUCTURE FOR "SOFTER" SKILLS TO REINFORCE THEIR IMPORTANCE AND SHOW WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE FOR DELIVERY OF "PEOPLE IMPACT" AS WELL AS FINANCIAL VALUE

WELL-DEFINED, QUANTITATIVE METRICS PROVIDE CLARITY AND A SENSE OF HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...BUT OVER-EMPHASIZING WHAT'S MEASURABLE CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT WHAT'S PERCEIVED AS IMPORTANT

BIASES WHEN DEFINING OR GAUGING VALUE

CONFLICTING CULTURAL NORMS

DEFAULTING TO OLD MENTAL MODELS

PERCEPTIONS OF UNFAIRNESS

DE-PRIORITIZING WHAT'S *NOT* MEASURED

EVEN WHEN WE ARE BEING SMART AND STRATEGIC, OUR EMBEDDED ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPERTISE CAN MAKE US SUSCEPTIBLE TO BIAS... THIS CAN RESULT IN:

BIASES WHEN DECIDING ON A PATH OF ACTION

Decisions about **which path of action to take** are more "verby." While they also have to do with evaluating options, they are more grounded in committing to a process than a static state.

For example, if "definition of value" is more about selecting a strategy to pursue, choosing a path of action is deciding which steps to take in order to achieve it.

These decisions about the *way to do something*, rather than which option to pursue, also deal with concepts like uncertainty and what good looks like, but adds the dimension of how decisions play out over time, and an element of cause and effect.

REDUCED APPETITE TO TRY NEW APPROACHES

STICKING WITH WHAT WORKED IN THE PAST PROVIDES FIRM FOOTING FOR DECISION-MAKING ...BUT ORGANIZATIONS ARE OFTEN OPTIMIZED TO SUPPORT THE NORM

THE MOST SENIOR OPINIONS TEND TO CROWD OUT OTHER OPTIONS

It's human nature to defer to the senior voices in the room (*Sunflower effect*) seek perspectives from others who "get it," but this can lead to leaving out or dampening counter-opinions which they are needed most (*Groupthink*).

USE SECRET BALLOT METHODS TO ENCOURAGE TRUE ADVOCACY INSTEAD OF FOLLOWING THE SENIOR VOICES IN THE ROOM

ASSIGN ROLES OR DEVIL'S ADVOCACY TO TEASE OUT ISSUES WITH REDUCED FEAR OF BIAS

EXTERNALIZE GOALS AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD SOLUTIONS TO DE-PERSONALIZE IDEAS, AND RE-FOCUS ON WHETHER THEY ARE ACHIEVING DESIRED AIMS

PEOPLE AVOID DOING THINGS THEY FEAR WILL MAKE THEM LOOK DUMB OR INEPT

Trying new things can make people anxious, especially when they are used to feeling capable or when surrounded by others who might judge their abilities (*Identity protection bias*).

PROVIDE REFERENCES OR ACCESS TO EXPERTISE TO REDUCE WORRIES ABOUT DOING THINGS WRONG

EXPLICITLY STATE THAT TRYING NEW APPROACHES WILL NOT BE PENALIZED

IT FEELS TOO LATE TO TURN BACK FROM A KNOWN PATH

Sometimes it's clear mid-stream that the current approach is not working, but when deadlines are looming it often feels more sensible to keep on plugging away over throwing progress away or starting again (*Sunk cost*).

APPLY LONGER-TERM LENSES TO MORE FAIRLY ESTIMATE THE COSTS OF CHANGING COURSE

BROADEN DEFINITIONS OF "LOSS" TO GAUGE THE IMPLICATIONS OF STAYING ON THE CURRENT PATH

ESTABLISHED HABITS WIN OUT IN THE ABSENCE OF REASONS TO ACT DIFFERENTLY

Sure, you could do something differently, and maybe it would work out just fine, or even better than we expect... but that sounds like so much more work (*Status quo bias*)...

COLLECT AND PROVIDE ALTERNATE EXAMPLES OF METHODS OR APPLICATIONS

BRING IN DIVERSE PROCESSES OR VIEWPOINTS WITH THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF BROADENING VIEWS

INTRODUCE NOVELTY TO SHAKE UP OLD WAYS OF ACTING

IT FEELS SAFER TO USE KNOWN AND RELIABLE APPROACHES TO ENSURE DESIRED OUTCOMES

Results are what matters, and when one way has proven successful again and again (*Availability*) it can be a hard sell to try something untested and unproven (*Risk aversion*).

EXPLICITLY IDENTIFY AREAS WHERE TRYING NEW APPROACHES IS ENCOURAGED—EVEN DEMANDED—FROM TOP TO BOTTOM OF TEAMS

PROVIDE A "SAFETY NET" FOR TEAMS TO TRY NEW THINGS WITHOUT FEAR OF BEING BLAMED FOR LESS THAN OPTIMAL RESULTS

LACK OF SUCCESS STORIES OR REWARDS REDUCE INTEREST IN TRYING NEW APPROACHES

With no roadmap or sense of pitfalls to avoid, no best practices to rely on, and no sense of how to even get started it can hard to even envision what success looks like (*Availability*), let alone feel confident knowing in how (*Social cognitive theory*).

USE EXPERIMENTS AND "FAILURES" AS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

REWARD TRYING NEW THINGS FOR GOOD REASONS, EVEN IF THEY DON'T ULTIMATELY WORK

DIFFICULTY SEEING ALTERNATE PATHS AS VIABLE OR VALID

OUR OWN PAST SUPPLIES VIVID, RICHLY DETAILED EXAMPLES TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING... ...BUT WE TEND TO OVER-EMPHASIZE THOSE CLOSE-TO-HOME EXAMPLES TO THE EXCLUSION OF OTHERS

ONE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE FEELS MORE CONCRETE, VIVID, AND GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE COMPARED TO OTHERS'

Whether it's our path to the C suite or how we've dealt with knotty client problems, our own personal successes are almost inescapably more compelling and convincing than those of others' (*Availability, Hindsight bias*), especially if those others have different background, skillsets, or less of a track record of taking care of business.

RESIST ASSUMING THAT YOUR PERSONAL APPROACH IS *THE* ONE, EVEN IF IT HAS WORKED WELL IN YOUR EXPERIENCE

ACTIVELY SEEK OUT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS AND PATHS FOR GETTING THERE

PEOPLE FILL UNCERTAINTY WITH SPECULATIVE (OFTEN WORST CASE) SCENARIOS

Loss feels worse than gains feel good (*Prospect theory*), which means we give it disproportionate attention. This is exacerbated by our tendency to lean on easily-recalled examples, (*Availability*) which tends to feature heightened emotion or circumstances, and the fact that people are bad with abstraction, so they tend to fill knowledge gaps with concrete stories to fill the void.

PROVIDE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS OF INFORMATION, EVEN IF IT IS (OR MIGHT BE PERCEIVED AS) NEGATIVE NEWS

RECOGNIZE WHEN A LACK OF INFORMATION, HOWEVER BENIGN, IS LIKELY TO FEED UNHEALTHY SPECULATION

A LACK OF EXAMPLES LIMITS OUR PERCEPTION OF VALID WAYS TO SUCCEED

Our tendency to over-weight things that are vivid, recent, or otherwise front of mind (*Availability*) tends to give more prominence to examples from our personal experience, past and present. This inability to envision other examples outside our narrow frame means it is harder to conceptualize alternate examples as fully or as credibly, which makes alternatives feel more abstract and less compelling.

ELICIT STORIES FROM ALTERNATE SITUATIONS, PEOPLE, OR ORGANIZATIONS TO USE AS REFERENCE POINTS

ACTIVELY CAPTURE AND SHARE DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS WHEN THEY DO OCCUR, TO GROW THE ORGANIZATION'S ABILITY TO ENVISION ALTERNATIVES TO THE USUAL

AN UNREALISTIC SENSE OF WHAT'S ACHIEVABLE

REDUCING TIME OR RESOURCES CAN ENCOURAGE STREAMLINING AND INCREASE PROFITABILITY... BUT CONTINUALLY RESETTING THE BAR OF A NEW NORMAL CAN RESET EXPECTATIONS BEYOND WHAT'S REALISTIC

TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON POSITIVE END OUTCOMES ("WE PULLED IT OFF")

We have a natural tendency to focus on highs and low points, but especially on end points (*Recency effect*). In addition, we often look back with 20/20 hindsight (*Hindsight bias*), assuming that whatever happened was a done deal only because it's the only reality we know.

CONDUCT DEBRIEFS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THINGS END TO CAPTURE WHAT *DIDN'T* WORK, IN ADDITION TO WHAT DID

CALCULATE BOTH SHORT AND LONG TERM COSTS THAT WENT INTO ACHIEVING END GOALS

AVOID SURPRISES BY CONSIDERING POTENTIAL CONTINGENCIES, UNANTICIPATED COMPLEXITY, OR INTERRUPTIONS

PEOPLE COMMITTING TO DEADLINES ARE NOT THE ONES WHO HAVE TO MEET THEM

Our own sense of particulars and nuances are much more evident for ourselves than for others (*Actor/ observer effect*)... this means the realities of time, effort, and resources required to get things done are very clear for own efforts, but easy to underestimate when it comes to others' work.

INVOLVE A BROADER SET OF VIEWS WHILE PLANNING, TO ENSURE "DOERS" HAVE A SAY IN REALISTICALLY RESOURCING AND SCOPING THE WORK

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP A MORE NUANCED VIEW OF WHAT OTHERS DO

UNDUE OPTIMISM THAT THINGS WILL GET DONE BECAUSE DEADLINES SEEM SUFFICIENTLY FAR AWAY

Lynch and Zauberman describe a "Yes...damn!" effect (*Time optimism*), which describes our *shifting* perception of time when we commit to do something (there's plenty v. when we need to actually deliver on those promises (what, already?)

DEVELOP THE HABIT OF CAPTURING HOW LONG THINGS *REALLY* TAKE TO BE MORE REALISTIC ABOUT ACTUAL V. IMAGINED TIME TO GET THINGS DONE

DOCUMENT LESSONS ALONG THE WAY TO AVOID CRITICAL DETAILS SLIPPING AWAY

SUCCESS CREATES A "NEW NORMAL" THAT IS HARD TO REEL BACK

We tend to cling to "anchors" to set our set of normal (*Anchoring*), get accustomed to norms through personal experience (*Adaptation*), and dial up the unsustainable all the more recent events (*Recency effect*) over past experience... so whatever happened last often becomes the new starting point for next time.

DOCUMENT EXPERIENCES — BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS— WHILE THEY ARE HAPPENING TO CREATE A MORE REALISTIC VIEW OF WHAT WAS REQUIRED AND INFORM FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

USE MULTIPLE DATA POINTS— NOT JUST THE MOST RECENT— TO CREATE A MORE REALISTIC PICTURE OF WHAT "NORMAL" IS

EFFICIENCY AT THE EXPENSE OF EFFECTIVENESS

INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY IS A WORTHY GOAL... BUT NOT EVERYTHING IS A BRUTE FORCE EFFORT, AND OVER-EFFICIENCY CAN BLIND US TO DOING THINGS WELL

WE FALL BACK ON OLD MENTAL MODELS OF WHAT PROGRESS LOOKS LIKE

Our past experience heavily shapes our sense of "what good looks like", making it harder to accept new signals as equally valid and reinforcing what we already "know" (*Confirmation bias*).

EXPLICITLY INSTILL NEW MENTAL MODELS ("GO SLOW TO GO FAST") TO HELP CONCRETIZE NEW APPROACHES

POINT TO SUCCESS STORIES TO MAKE NEW MODELS FEEL LESS ABSTRACT AND MORE BELIEVABLE

WE TEND TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S NEXT, RATHER THAN THE POTENTIALLY BETTER PATHS NOT TAKEN

The path *not* taken naturally feels more abstract (*Attentional collapse*), so after work has been completed it takes more effort to recall and fully capture where different choices would have led to better outcomes.

BUILD IN TIME FOR REFLECTION AFTER WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED TO INFORM FUTURE SITUATIONS

CONDUCT DEBRIEFS WITH ENTIRE TEAMS, NOT JUST THOSE CLOSEST TO THE WORK, TO BUILD BROADER AWARENESS OF HOW CHOICES IMPACTED THE FINAL RESULTS

EFFICIENCY IS EMPHASIZED BECAUSE IT IS CONNECTED WITH EASILY CAPTURABLE VALUES, LIKE TIME ELAPSED

Easy-to-measure values are often used to help us demonstrate progress, and to see more precisely where we came from, where we are, and how far we have to go. But this can lead to relying too heavily on easily capturable and quantitative data over qualitative measures that may be more meaningful, and can accidentally result in quantitative measures becoming proxies for actual value (*Quantification bias*).

TAKE NOTE WHEN PEOPLE ARE "PLAYING TO METRICS," AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER, EQUALLY VALUABLE GOALS

DEVELOP AND CULTIVATE SUPPLEMENTAL MEASURES —BOTH LEADING AND LAGGING—THAT INDICATE MORE QUALITATIVE MEASURES OF SUCCESS

CLARIFY GOALS TO ENSURE THAT WHAT IS BEING MEASURED IS MEANINGFUL, AND ACCURATELY REFLECTS DESIRED END RESULT

BRUTE FORCE EFFORT "LOOKS THE PART" OF BEING PRODUCTIVE

We tend to use parts to interpret a whole (*Representativeness*), so "looking busy" can end up being a visual proxy for making progress and taking care of business, when it's not actually contributing as much as activities that may be perceived as inefficient.

DEFINE AND SHARE WHAT "PROGRESS" ACTUALLY MEANS IN ADVANCE, TO AVOID ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT WHAT "BEING PRODUCTIVE" LOOKS LIKE

PROVIDE DEFINITION AND CLARITY ON THE GOALS OF ACTIVITIES, TO MORE EASILY MAKE THE CASE THAT WORK IS MOVING FORWARD

BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AT WORK... LITERALLY

Yet uncertainty is as present between 9 and 5 as it is in other aspects of our lives, and the (mis)perceptions and go-to behaviors that we exhibit as consumers and citizens are also present in our salaried lives. While we may recognize our foibles in daily life, cognitive biases can be harder to identify and overcome at work due to our assumptions that our decisions and actions are more logical and rational in a professional setting.

In fact, the opposite may be true: *the very tendencies we rely on as experienced professionals — seeing patterns in data, relying on our past experiences to guide future action, and the sense of "that's one of those" as a way to navigate new situations — can inadvertently blind us to new ways in which we shut down new ways of thinking, fail to identify or cultivate people different than ourselves as capable leaders, and lump new situations into buckets that should be rethought rather than replenished.*

SIGNALS AND STRATEGIES

"Nudges" like blind auditions for orchestras and resume reviews can help address these kinds of biases in situations when we know they are likely to occur. But behavioral blind spots are also present during everyday work, and the sense of "hidden in plain sight" nature can make them harder to see. This chart indicates how some of those "signals" manifest at work, with explanations for the biases that cause them, and strategies to help reduce potential negative impact.
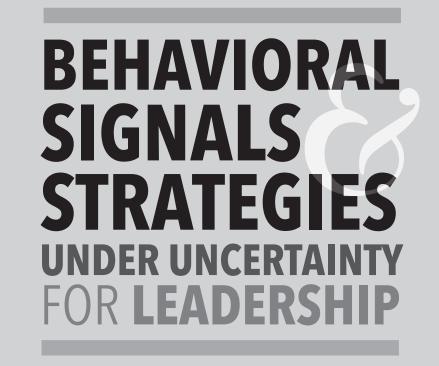

Cognitive processes that lead to systematic biases

Common situations that result from strategies used to solve for uncertainty

Signals of issues at work, underlying behavioral principles, and potential strategies for overcoming them

Two common problem-solving modes where we rely on frequently invoke under uncertainty

BEHAVIORAL SIGNALS & STRATEGIES UNDER UNCERTAINTY FOR LEADERSHIP