Chapter XI

Managing Limited-Perspective Bias in IT

Jo Ellen Moore
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, USA

Lisa A. Burke
Louisiana State University in Shreveport, USA

ABSTRACT

We define limited-perspective bias (LPB) as a human tendency to overestimate the completeness of what we know and to act on our own (limited) perspective of what is important. This bias contributes to ineffective decision-making, especially in the IT arena. Elements of interdependence, uncertainty, ambiguity, role incompatibility, and a deadline-driven work pace set the stage for occurrences of LPB in IT. To aid in our understanding and awareness of LPB, we examine its occurrence.
within two contemporary IT contexts (technology implementation projects and retention of IT professionals), discussing ways in which LPB can create problems and, more importantly, ways to minimize LPB. We conclude by summarizing the basic pattern of our advice for managing limited-perspective bias in IT.

MANAGING LIMITED-PERSPECTIVE BIAS IN IT

“Some problems are so complex that you have to be highly intelligent and well informed to be undecided about them.”
(Peter, 1982, September 24)

When considering strategies for managing IS/IT personnel, researchers and practitioners commonly focus on macro-level issues, such as organizational policies, recruitment strategies, selection criteria, and compensation schemes. Having suitable policies and best practice guidelines in place is no doubt crucial, as they are requisite for appropriate organizational functioning. It’s analogous to having a game plan and practiced skills going into a ballgame. But, as the game unfolds, individual participants in various positions think and react to unanticipated occurrences encountered on the playing field. Similarly, organizational functioning, in the end, comes down to a multitude of individual decisions and actions occurring day in and day out.

Because of this, organizations are vitally dependent on the judgment and behavior of individual employees (particularly in individualistic national cultures). An employee’s perception of the game, the players, and the playing field is not formed solely by corporate HR handbooks and policy statements; rather, it evolves from what the individual employee personally experiences and observes in vivo. That is, a worker’s decision framework and perspective derive largely from the informal accumulation of daily perceptions and experience. Employees continually collect perceptions in the workplace, both directly, via conversations and exchanges, and vicariously, through observation of coworkers, supervisors, and organizational symbols. Ultimately, organizations are made up of a host of individual players with personalized cognitive maps and schemas. Granted, these maps likely have some level of commonality due to socialization and cultural mechanisms, but each individual also possesses his or her own unique and individually sculpted perspective.
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