Chapter XI

Managing Limited-Perspective Bias in IT

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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

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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, organi-
zational 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 cul-
tures). 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 experi-
ence. Employees continually collect perceptions in the workplace, both
directly, via conversations and exchanges, and vicariously, through observation
of coworkers, supervisors, and organizational symbols. Ultimately, organiza-
tions 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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