













12 Cognitive Biases That Can Impact Search Committee Decisions

<p>1. Anchoring Bias Over-relying on the first piece of information obtained and using it as the baseline for comparison.</p>  <p><i>For example</i>, if the first applicant has an unusually high test score, it might set the bar so high that applicants with more normal scores seem less qualified than they otherwise would.</p> <p><u>PsychCentral: The Anchoring Effect and How it Impacts Your Everyday Life</u></p>	<p>2. Availability Bias Making decisions based on immediate information or examples that come to mind.</p>  <p><i>If search committee</i> members hear about a candidate from Georgia who accepted a job and then quit because of the cold weather, they might be more likely to assume that all candidates from the southern U.S. would dislike living in Minnesota.</p> <p><u>VerywellMind: Availability Heuristic and Making Decisions</u></p>	<p>3. Bandwagon Effect A person is more likely to go along with a belief if there are many others who hold that belief. Other names for this are "herd mentality" or "group think."</p>  <p><i>In a search</i>, it may be difficult for minority opinions to be heard if the majority of the group holds a strong contrary view.</p> <p><u>WiseGEEK: What is a Bandwagon Effect?</u> <u>Psychology Today: The Bandwagon Effect</u></p>
<p>4. Choice-supportive Bias Once a decision is made, people tend to over-focus on its benefits and minimize its flaws.</p>  <p><i>Search committee</i> members may emphasize rationale that supports decisions they have made in the past. "We hired someone from a prestigious university last time and it worked out really well."</p> <p><u>Plexxi: On Choice-Supportive Bias and the Need for Paranoid Optimism</u></p>	<p>5. Confirmation Bias Paying more attention to information that reinforces previously held beliefs and ignoring evidence to the contrary.</p>  <p><i>A search committee</i> member who believes that women are more intelligent might selectively focus on aspects of resumes that highlight the intelligence of female applicants.</p> <p><u>Psychology Today: What is Confirmation Bias?</u> <u>VerywellMind: Confirmation Bias</u></p>	<p>6. Fundamental Attribution Error Overemphasizing personal factors and under-estimating situational factors when explaining other people's behavior.</p>  <p><i>For example</i>, if an applicant is late to an interview the committee might conclude he is irresponsible or lazy, rather than remember that a major campus access road was closed unexpectedly.</p> <p><u>Ethics Unwrapped: Fundamental Attribution Error</u></p>
<p>7. Halo Effect Judging others similarly on all traits, assuming that because someone is good or bad at one thing they will be equally good or bad at another.</p>  <p><i>During a search</i>, if a candidate has strong educational credentials the committee might conclude that she is also a strong leader.</p> <p><u>The Economist: The Halo Effect</u> <u>Robert Half: Hiring and the Halo-Effect Trap</u></p>	<p>8. Ingroup Preference Bias People tend to divide themselves into groups, and then attribute positive attributes to their own group.</p>  <p><i>Search committee members</i> who perceive commonalities with applicants are more likely to view them favorably.</p> <p><u>Explore Psychology: What is the Ingroup Bias?</u> <u>Understanding Prejudice: Ingroup Favoritism</u></p>	<p>9. The "Jerk" Factor It's not a cognitive bias, but research has shown an academic tendency to over-value individuals who display "brilliant but cruel" behavior and to attribute less intelligence to people with "nice" behavior.</p>  <p><i>Search committee members</i> can be unduly impressed by an academic star that builds himself up at the cost of behaving disrespectfully toward others.</p> <p><u>WorkMatters: Brilliant but Cruel</u></p>
<p>10. Ostrich Effect Avoiding bad news about a decision by ignoring data that might be negative.</p>  <p><i>For example</i>, a committee may choose not to pay attention to data about how their choice affects diversity goals or minority employment rates.</p> <p><u>99u: The Ostrich Problem and the Danger of Not Tracking Your Progress</u> <u>Effectiviology: The Ostrich Effect-On the Danger of Burying Your Head in the Sand</u></p>	<p>11. Recency Effect Recent events are easier to remember, and can be weighed more heavily than past events or potential future events.</p>  <p><i>In a search</i>, candidates that were interviewed early in the process may be evaluated less favorably. A similar bias is the proximity effect, in which candidates interviewed in person are viewed more favorably than those interviewed via distance technology.</p> <p><u>SKYbrary: Recency Bias</u></p>	<p>12. Zero-risk Bias Preferring the choice that provides certainty of a smaller benefit as opposed to an alternative with more risk and greater potential benefit.</p>  <p><i>Search committees</i> may seek to avoid risk by hiring a "safer" candidate with a greater perceived likelihood of success rather than taking a reasonable amount of risk.</p> <p><u>Decision Lab: Zero Risk Bias</u></p>