

SOCIAL COGNITION (Part 8)

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Availability heuristic

Availability heuristic is a strategy for making judgment based on availability of information that came out from mind or memory. It seems like judging by how easily something comes to our mind. Besides Woolfolk (2010) said that availability heuristic can be explain by judging the likelihood of an event based on what is available in our memory, assuming those easily remembered events are common. However if instances of events come to mind easily, we think they are common occurrences, but that is not necessarily the case; in fact, it is often wrong. People remember vivid stories and quickly come to believe that such events are the norm, but again, they often are wrong. For examples:

- People who read more case studies of successful businesses may judge the probability of running a successful business to be greater.
- A person argues that cigarette smoking is not unhealthy because his grandfather smoked three packs of cigarettes a day and lived to be 100. The grandfather's health could simply be an unusual case that does not speak to the health of smokers in general.

Based on the examples above, the availability heuristic may caused people tend to be biased by information that is easier to recall. They are swayed by information that is vivid, well-publicized or recent. Unfortunately sometimes what is easiest to remember is not typical of the overall picture. At last will leading to faulty conclusions.

For overall we often apply heuristics automatically to make quick judgments; that saves us time in everyday problem solving. Besides there are some evidence proved that our unconscious minds can do better at some tasks than our conscious minds do. We realize also that there is a power in uncontrolled thinking; which it is a part of the definition of automatic thinking that occurs unconsciously, unintentional, involuntary and effortless. While heuristics are helpful in many situations, but there still have some problems with heuristics that sometimes can lead to tragic errors and biases. Like examples:

- Heuristics do not guarantee that people will make accurate inferences about the world.
- Sometimes heuristics are inadequate for the job at hand or are misapplied, leading to faulty judgments.

As we discuss the mental strategies that sometimes lead to errors, however, keep in mind that people still use heuristics for a reason: *Most of the time, they are highly functional and serve us well.* So we as a human must believe that ‘the quality of our thought determines the quality of our choices in life’.