

Lecture 9, Jan 25, 2023

Biases

- The impressions we form of others are susceptible to a number of perceptual biases
- Factors of social identity can be used for people to project their biases
- Biases serve as more efficient shortcuts to save us time and from danger
 - However this makes us misunderstand and misjudge people, even when they haven't earned it
- People have implicit theories about which characteristics go together
 - e.g. short and silver hair means little kind old lady
 - This is not often true, which leads to stereotypes
- Stereotypes are our tendency to generalize about people in a social category and ignore variations among them

Attribution

- The process by which we assign causes or motives to explain people's behaviour
 - e.g. attributing behaviour to traits of personality
 - Rewards and punishments are based on judgements about what really caused people to behave in a certain way
 - * e.g. participation marks for attending class
 - An important goal is to determine whether some behaviour is caused by dispositional (internal) or situational (external) factors
- We rely on external cues and make inferences from these cues to make attributions
 - Does the person engage in the behaviour *consistently*?
 - * Consistency points towards dispositional factors
 - Do most people engage in the behaviour (*consensus*), or is it unique to this person?
 - * Consensus points towards situational factors
 - Does the person engage in the behaviour in many situations, or is it *distinctive* to one situation?
 - * Distinctiveness points towards situational factors

Biases in Attribution

- Attributions are not always correct; there are 3 types of biases in attribution:
 - Fundamental attribution error: overemphasizing dispositional explanations
 - * e.g. a person is active in a class not because of the nature of the class but because they are an extravert
 - * Overestimating of the influence of personality and underestimating situational factors
 - * Failure to observe distinction
 - Actor-observer effect: looking at someone's behaviour and making an attribution that's different from what we would associate with if we were in the situation ourselves
 - * e.g. when we're late, we attribute it to situational factors, but when other people are late we think they are lazy
 - * Actors are prone to attribute their own behaviour to situational factors while observers are more likely to invoke dispositional causes
 - Self-serving bias: how we explain our own behaviour differently
 - * Reflects intentional or natural self-promotion, and underestimates situational factors
 - * e.g. attributing success in a course to being smart, not the course being easy
 - * Contributors:
 - We attribute success to ability and effort
 - We attribute failures to external factors
 - We see ourselves as better than average
 - We overestimate how much others agree with us
 - We are unrealistically optimistic about our future
 - We overestimate the commonality of our flaws

- We underestimate the commonality of our abilities
 - * This applies less to people with lower self-esteem
 - Selective perception: we only select certain things to pay attention to when making attributions
- How do we minimize these errors?
 - Increase personal interaction – talking to them, getting to know them and understanding them
 - * Focus on unique attributes of individuals
 - Identify and confront your stereotypes, don't be defensive about them

Diversity and Discrimination

- Diversity should be valued, not just tolerated
 - This creates a culture of fairness
- Properly managed Diversity can create a competitive advantage, including improved problem solving, creativity, recruiting and marketing, and global competitiveness
- Stereotypes create barriers to diversity in the workforce
 - Generalization and ignorance of variations create a toxic environment – they expect everyone to fit into the same categories
 - Members of a social group feel they might be judged or treated according to a stereotype, which creates a worse environment
- Discrimination is a distinction, exclusion or preference based on a prohibited ground, as set out by law
- Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional
 - Intentional discrimination is direct, involving unequal treatment and direct prejudiced actions
 - Unintentional discrimination is indirect, constructive or systemic and unintentional, embedded in policies and neutral actions