

Assessment and Next Steps: Dangerous Judgment Errors in the Workplace

By Dr. Gleb Tsipursky, CEO



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avoid business disasters**

DESCRIPTION

This assessment evaluates the impact of cognitive biases - the term behavioral economists use for typical judgment errors we make as human beings - in the workplace. It also provides guidance for next steps based on the results of the analysis.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky, CEO of Disaster Avoidance Experts, has over 20 years of experience consulting, coaching, and professionally speaking on avoiding business disasters. A best-selling author of several books on this topic, including *Never Go With Your Gut: How Pioneering Leaders Make the Best Business Decisions and Avoid Business Disasters*, his cutting-edge thought leadership was featured in over 400 articles and over 350 interviews in venues such as *Inc. Magazine*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Scientific American*, and *Fast Company*.

Email: gleb@disasteravoidanceexperts.com

Phone: 614-407-4016

ABOUT DISASTER AVOIDANCE EXPERTS

Disaster Avoidance Experts is a boutique consulting and training firm that empowers leaders and organizations to avoid business disasters by using cutting-edge research to help them address potential threats, seize unexpected opportunities, and resolve persistent personnel problems. We dramatically improve the bottom line of our clients, which range from mid-size businesses and nonprofits to Fortune 500 companies.

Email: info@disasteravoidanceexperts.com

Phone: 614-733-9771

Website: disasteravoidanceexperts.com

DIRECTIONS

Each question below refers to a problem that might occur in everyday professional situations. Your goal is to indicate how often the problem occurred in your workplace in the past year. The answer for each question will be in percentage terms out of all the possible times the problem might have occurred. If you are doing this assessment with a focus on a specific organizational department, team, or group, apply your evaluation only to that unit. Don't overthink it! Go with your initial impression, it doesn't have to be absolutely precise. Each question should take you 15-20 seconds.

QUESTIONNAIRE

#	Question	Answer
1.	____% of projects that missed the deadline or went over budget	%
2.	____% of team conflicts that occurred because someone overestimated the effectiveness of their communication skills and persuasiveness	%
3.	Of all significant decisions, in ____% of cases someone was overconfident about the decision	%
4.	Of all situations when someone had evidence that would contradict their beliefs (or clear information that would disprove their interpretation of the situation), in ____% of cases they ignored the evidence (or misinterpreted the information).	%
5.	____% of situations when an individual or a team had to deal with difficult and/or uncomfortable issues, but focused on trivial issues instead.	%
6.	When a potential or current employee was evaluated, in what ____% of the situations was the evaluation too positive due to factors not relevant to their job competency or organizational fit?	%
7.	When a potential or current employee was evaluated, in what ____% of the situations was the evaluation too negative due to factors not relevant to their job competency or organizational fit?	%
8.	____% of team conflicts that occurred because someone proposed ill-considered or insufficiently thought-out ideas	%
9.	____% of team conflicts that occurred because someone opposed innovative or surprising ideas	%

#	Question	Answer
10.	Of all times when someone could have passed up valuable but negative information up the chain of command, they failed to do so in ____% of cases	%
11.	Of all times when someone defended an idea too strongly, in ____% of cases they came up with the idea	%
12.	Of all times someone continued investing resources into an ongoing project, in ____% of cases they did so even though they had substantial evidence that the project was not succeeding	%
13.	Of all times when someone claimed that they had accurately predicted a specific development or outcome, in ____% of cases they actually did not predict it	%
14.	Of all times when someone opposed making a change, in ____% of cases they did so only because it was a change, regardless of whether it would overall help the bottom line	%
15.	Of all times when an inaccurate claim about something (a person, project, or other topic) became widely accepted, in ____% of cases this occurred because the inaccurate claim was frequently repeated by someone	%
16.	Of all times when there was an opportunity to take a worthwhile risk, it was not taken in ____% of situations	%
17.	Of all times when someone claimed that they made no errors in judgment, the ____% of times they were wrong	%
18.	Of all times when a disagreement occurred, in ____% of times someone let their desired conclusion influence their evaluation of the evidence	%

#	Question	Answer
19.	Of all times when someone's behavior was attributed to their personality, in ____% of cases their behavior was actually a result of the situation in which they found themselves	%
20.	____% of individual or team plans did not include contingencies for threats (or opportunities) that were unlikely to occur, but could have significant consequences if they did arise	%
21.	____% of individual or team plans overemphasized short-term and medium-term outcomes over long-term outcomes	%
22.	Of all times when someone claimed credit for themselves in a team project, in ____% cases they claimed more credit than they deserved	%
23.	Of all times when there was clear evidence of a problematic situation, someone ignored it in ____% of cases	%
24.	Of all times when a decision was evaluated, in ____% of times someone focused mainly on the outcomes rather than considering the quality of the decision-making process	%
25.	Of all times when someone had to evaluate themselves, in ____% of situations they overestimated their positive qualities and underestimated their negative qualities	%
26.	Of all situations when an outcome was being measured, in ____% of cases someone conflated the means used to measure an outcome with the outcome itself (i.e. equated employee responses on satisfaction surveys with actual level of employee satisfaction)	%

#	Question	Answer
27.	Of all situations when someone had all the relevant information needed to make a decision, in ____% of cases they continued to request additional information before making the decision	%
28.	Of all times when someone thought that others in the organization agreed with them, they were wrong in ____% of cases	%
29.	Of all situations when an action was considered, in ____% of cases the costs of failing to act were not adequately considered	%
30.	Of all times when someone was evaluating a situation and making a decision, in ____% of cases they underestimated the intensity of feelings of other people (employees, customers, vendors, or other stakeholders)	%

SCORING RUBRIC

Numerical Score

Directions: Add up all the answers above to get the numerical score for your workplace.

Numerical score: _____

Letter Score

Directions: Use the guidelines below to give your workplace a letter score. Please treat the guidelines as an approximation, not as a conclusive determination.

For example, if the overall score is 700, but four of the questions have a score of 90, this indicates that some areas of your workplace are experiencing high levels of dangerous judgment errors that need to be addressed. In that case, you should give your workplace a C as the letter score.

By contrast, if the score is 1000 and all questions had a score of 30 or less, your workplace might need only minor tweaks to address dangerous judgment errors. These tweaks might include conducting some basic training on these errors and making some changes in your processes. In that case, you should give your workplace a B as the letter score.

Note that some judgment errors are much more dangerous than others. For instance, many strong companies have suffered major setbacks when they inaccurately evaluated the intensity of feelings among stakeholders, such as the strength of customer loyalty or resistance to change among employees. Give your workplace a lower score if the judgment errors you identify are particularly dangerous, based on your own estimate of the situation.

Please make sure to provide a justification if your letter score differs from your numerical score.

0 - 300: A

Your workplace is experiencing a minimal level of dangerous judgment errors. Current processes and practices are working well and require normal vigilance for cognitive biases to protect your bottom line.

310 - 900: B

Your workplace is experiencing a slight level of dangerous judgment errors and requires some fine-tuning in current processes and practices to stop harming its bottom line.

910 - 1500: C

Your workplace is experiencing a moderate level of dangerous judgment errors and requires a substantial intervention to adjust current processes and practices to stop harming its bottom line.

1510 - 2100: D

Your workplace is experiencing a high level of dangerous judgment errors and requires major changes to current processes and practices in order to stop significant harm to its bottom line.

2110 - 3000: F

Your workplace is experiencing a catastrophic level of dangerous judgment errors and requires a full-scale overhaul of current processes and practices to stop harming its bottom line.

Numerical score: _____

Letter Score: _____

IMPACT EVALUATION

This section provides a rough estimate of the financial impact of the judgment errors you uncovered and of how much money your organization, department, team, and/or you personally will lose in the next year if the errors are not addressed.

Directions: Do a rough estimate of the financial impact of the judgment errors you uncovered.

Some of these errors are easy to quantify. For example, it's relatively easy to estimate the costs of projects missing deadlines or running over budget, or the costs of throwing good money after bad. It's harder to assess the costs of judgment errors that result in issues like internal conflict or misinterpreted evidence. For these issues you may choose to evaluate the financial consequences of the loss in productivity due to employee disengagement, time spent on internal politics over external productivity, increased sick days due to lowered mental and physical well-being, and the losses resulting from higher turnover and increased costs of hiring and training new employees.

1. Write down your current annual revenue and expenses, to the extent that these are applicable to your role:

Current revenue: \$ _____ **Current expenses:** \$ _____

2. How much can you increase your revenue and decrease your expenses in the next year if you eliminate 20% of judgment errors in your workplace (20% is a conservative estimate of the impact of effective interventions as shown by behavioral science research).

Increase in revenue: \$ _____ **Decrease in expenses:** \$ _____

3. Given the numbers above, how much would it be wise to invest into eliminating judgment errors?

Amount to invest in eliminating judgment errors: \$ _____

COMPETENCIES

The dangerous judgment errors described above fall into four broad competencies: evaluations of oneself, evaluations of others, strategic evaluations of risks and rewards, and tactical evaluations in project implementation. Although these competencies are somewhat overlapping, we can generally place each question as primarily within one of these four competencies.

Directions: Follow the steps below to identify the competencies that are most affected by judgment errors in your workplace. Focus on improving performance in these areas for maximum impact. If they are, then you can focus on that competency in improving performance.

Self-Evaluations: how good are the employees in your workplace at evaluating themselves?

Add your scores for the following questions:

Question	#3	#13	#17	#22	#25	Total
Score						

Divide the total by 5: _____%

This percentage represents how frequently the employees in your workplace fall into judgment errors when evaluating themselves.

Anything over 10% is an issue. Anything over 30% is a problem. Anything over 50% is a serious problem.

Other-Evaluations: how good are the employees in your workplace at evaluating others?

Add your scores for the following questions:

Question	#2	#6	#7	#10	#19	#28	#30	Total
Score								

Divide the total by 7: _____%

This percentage represents how frequently the employees in your workplace fall into judgment errors when evaluating others.

Anything over 10% is an issue. Anything over 30% is a problem. Anything over 50% is a serious problem.

Strategic Evaluations: how good are the employees in your workplace at evaluating risks and rewards, making plans, and having foresight?

Add your scores for the following questions:

Question	#4	#5	#8	#9	#11	#14	#15	#16	#18	#20	#23	Total
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Divide the total by 11: _____%

This percentage represents how frequently the employees in your workplace fall into judgment errors when making strategic evaluations.

Anything over 10% is an issue. Anything over 30% is a problem. Anything over 50% is a serious problem.

Tactical Evaluations: how good are the employees in your workplace at project development, implementation, and problem-solving?

Add your scores for the following questions:

Question	#1	#12	#21	#24	#26	#27	#29	Total
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Divide the total by 7: _____%

This percentage represents how frequently the employees in your workplace fall into judgment errors when making tactical evaluations.

Anything over 10% is an issue. Anything over 30% is a problem. Anything over 50% is a serious problem.

NEXT STEPS: ADDRESSING JUDGMENT ERRORS

Directions: If your results suggest that some work is needed, the next step is to determine what areas require further work. Look over your answers on the questions in the assessment, focusing on the ones you answered with 30% or higher. Prioritize a set of questions which require the most immediate work, next a set to work on in the short term, then a third set for the medium term, and delay action on the rest until later. From our consulting and coaching experience, it's best to select no more than 3 questions per set if the questions are unrelated, although it's fine to select more if they are within a single competency. You can prioritize either based on the frequency of occurrence, namely ones to which you gave a higher score, or those having the most negative impact on your workplace, or other factors particular to your organization and your role in it. For example, you can focus on addressing a single competency if you are in a position to influence that competency most effectively. You can either determine these priorities by yourself or in collaboration with others, i.e., your colleagues, coach, consultant, or mentor.

Next, decide on how you'll work on these issues, using either in-house resources or tapping external resources. In either case, but especially if you use in-house resources, see the commentary on the questions below to help you grasp the nature of and dangerous consequences to your workplace of each judgment error. Use this commentary to inform your work on the set of questions you chose, and visit DisasterAvoidanceExperts.com for further in-depth resources on protecting your workplace from these dangerous judgment errors. To learn more about the research on each cognitive bias that informed the set of questions you chose, see the Bibliography.

Question 1

_____ % of projects that missed the deadline or went over budget

This refers to the cognitive bias known as the planning fallacy, our tendency to assume that everything will go according to plan and consequently failing to build in needed resources to address the almost-inevitable problems that arise. In organizations, this tends to result in systematic cost and time overruns, harming the bottom line through poor planning.

Question 2

_____ % of team conflicts that occurred because someone overestimated the effectiveness of their communication skills and persuasiveness

This refers to the illusion of transparency, where we tend to overestimate how well other people understand how we feel and what we are trying to communicate, and also overestimate how well we understand how other people feel and what they are trying to communicate to us. As a result, individuals make inaccurate assumptions about how other people will evaluate situations and make decisions, and these false assumptions lead to unneeded team conflict that decreases employee engagement and motivation, harms retention, and results in worse decisions.

Question 3

Of all significant decisions, in _____ % of cases someone was overconfident about the decision

This refers to overconfidence bias, our tendency to have excessively strong confidence in our evaluation of the situation. In organizational settings, overconfidence bias results in rushed decisions that have not been sufficiently examined. Such decisions hurt the bottom line due to failing to address threats or failing to take advantage of opportunities, either of which might have been recognized with additional information gathering before making the decision.

Question 4

Of all situations when someone had evidence that would contradict their beliefs (or clear information that would disprove their interpretation of the situation), in ____% of cases they ignored the evidence (or misinterpreted the information).

This refers to the confirmation bias, which involves two parts: a tendency to ignore information that goes against our preferred beliefs and a tendency to look only for information that confirms our beliefs. The confirmation bias leads to launching pet projects that harm profitability, failing to address behaviors that lead to lawsuits, failure to give due consideration to suggestions that would substantially improve the bottom line, and other problems.

Question 5

____% of situations when an individual or a team had to deal with difficult and/or uncomfortable issues, but focused on trivial issues instead.

This refers to the law of triviality or bikeshedding, which involves individuals or teams focusing on easy-to-address but comparatively trivial issues while ignoring difficult or uncomfortable issues that are much more important. For example, members of the marketing department might be spending their time on the nitty-gritty of website design while their overall advertising strategy is failing to bring potential customers to the website, or the sales department might be debating the layout of the sales floor while the competition is increasingly outselling them.

Question 6

When a potential or current employee was evaluated, in what ____% of the situations was the evaluation too positive due to factors not relevant to their job competency or organizational fit?

Question 7

When a potential or current employee was evaluated, in what ____% of the situations was the evaluation too negative due to factors not relevant to their job competency or organizational fit?

These refer to a pair of judgment errors, the halo effect and the horns effect. The halo effect (question 6) refers to a tendency where if we like one characteristic of an individual that we consider important, we will tend to rate all other characteristics of that individual as more positive than is the case. The horns effect (question 7) refers to the opposite tendency. These two biases are the bane of assessments and evaluations, whether for hiring or promotion, and have led to problems ranging from incompetent people being promoted and competent people held back to serious lawsuits that crippled organizations and gravely tarnished their brands.

Question 8

____% of team conflicts that occurred because someone proposed ill-considered or insufficiently thought-out ideas

Question 9

____% of team conflicts that occurred because someone opposed innovative or surprising ideas

These also refer to a pair of judgment errors, the optimism bias and the pessimism bias. The optimism bias (question 8) describes the many people who tend to make overly positive assessments of risks and rewards, while the pessimism bias (question 9) refers to those who make excessively negative assessments. Optimistically-minded people are great at coming up with innovative new ideas, without thinking through all the potential problems. By contrast, pessimistically-inclined individuals come up with new ideas much more rarely, because they tend to see all the potential problems in a magnified manner, and frequently criticize others who come up with new ideas because they can see all the risks of these suggestions. As a result, optimistic and pessimistic team members often have tensions if they do not recognize and play to their strengths effectively.

Question 10

Of all times when someone could have passed up valuable but negative information up the chain of command, they failed to do so in ____% of cases

This refers to the MUM effect (also known as shooting the messenger), the tendency to blame the bearer of bad news for the bad news. This cognitive bias results in higher-level leaders in an organization failing to learn about the problems occurring

at the grassroots level, with a resulting backlog of problems building up over time, thus damaging profitability and demoralizing employees.

Question 11

Of all times when someone defended an idea too strongly, in ____% of cases they came up with the idea

This refers to two related biases, the IKEA effect and not invented here bias. The IKEA effect is about our tendency to overvalue our own ideas, products, and projects, while the not invented here bias describes an excessively negative evaluation of ideas, products, and projects that were not developed by us, our team, or our organization. Both of these tendencies are especially damaging for organizations interacting with the external environment, for instance when bringing products to market or when deciding whether to develop technologies internally or get them off-the-shelf.

Question 12

Of all times someone continued investing resources into an ongoing project, in ____% of cases they did so even though they had substantial evidence that the project was not succeeding

This refers to the sunk costs bias, our tendency to continue to invest additional resources into projects, products, or relationships despite evidence that they are not working out. This tendency to throw good money after bad can be seen in companies that tend to invest money into products or services that are clearly not selling, who double down on a strategic direction when evidence suggests that it's going in the wrong direction, or stick with employees who should have been moved to a different position or let go much earlier.

Question 13

Of all times when someone claimed that they had accurately predicted a specific development or outcome, in ____% of cases they actually did not predict it

This refers to the hindsight bias, our tendency to remember our evaluations and decisions as much more accurate than they actually were. In organizations, this tendency causes individuals to be excessively confident in their assessments in a way

that undermines future decision-making and also leads to team conflicts when people disagree about the quality of past evaluations and decisions.

Question 14

Of all times when someone opposed making a change, in ____% of cases they did so only because it was a change, regardless of whether it would overall help the bottom line

This refers to the status quo bias, our tendency to prefer that things stay the same and to fear any changes. The status quo bias poses a high danger to organizations in our rapidly-shifting world, since it impedes their ability to adapt to changes quickly, as well as to forecast and adapt to changes.

Question 15

Of all times when an inaccurate claim about something (a person, project, or other topic) became widely accepted, in ____% of cases this occurred because the inaccurate claim was frequently repeated by someone

This refers to the illusory truth effect, our tendency to grow increasingly comfortable with statements lacking evidence and accept them as true just because they are frequently repeated. In an organizational context where certain individuals have control over trusted formal or informal channels of communication, said individuals can spread incorrect information for the sake of personal benefit and have it be accepted as true through mere repetition while harming the organization's ability to make wise decisions.

Question 16

Of all times when there was an opportunity to take a worthwhile risk, it was not taken in ____% of situations

This refers to loss aversion, our tendency to avoid risking small losses at the cost of substantially larger gains. The result in organizations is a tendency to play it safe in lieu of taking smart risks, thus harming profitability.

Question 17

Of all times when someone claimed that they made no errors in judgment, the ____% of times they were wrong

This refers to bias blind spot, our tendency to believe that we have no blind spots and have perfectly clear vision of reality and that our decision-making is optimal, even though our vision is clouded by dozens of cognitive biases. The result of this bias in organizations is arrogance, and as the saying goes, pride goeth before a fall.

Question 18

Of all times when a disagreement occurred, in ____% of times someone let their desired conclusion influence their evaluation of the evidence

This refers to belief bias, the tendency to permit our personal beliefs and preferences to sway our perception and interpretation of evidence, especially when making decisions. As a consequence of belief bias, decisions in organizations are made based on the personal likes and dislikes of leaders rather than the quality of evidence, inevitably undermining the company's bottom line.

This refers to bias blind spot, our tendency to believe that we have no blind spots and have perfectly clear vision of reality and that our decision-making is optimal, even though our vision is clouded by dozens of cognitive biases. The result of this bias in organizations is arrogance, and as the saying goes, pride goeth before a fall.

Question 19

Of all times when someone's behavior was attributed to their personality, in ____% of cases their behavior was actually a result of the situation in which they found themselves

This refers to the fundamental attribution error, our tendency to attribute negative behaviors to the personality of other people rather than the context. Such incorrect attribution can gravely damage relationships within an organization or with external stakeholders, with the former undercutting employee motivation and engagement, and the latter harming reputation and external collaborations.

Question 20

____% of individual or team plans did not include contingencies for threats (or opportunities) that were unlikely to occur, but could have significant consequences if they did arise

This refers to the normalcy bias, our tendency to ignore predictable major threats that did not happen previously. Thus, organizations might not pay due attention to the need to protect themselves against potential disasters despite having more than sufficient information about a major threat, with devastating consequences when these disasters happen to them. The same applies to organizations failing to prepare themselves to take advantage of outstanding opportunities.

Question 21

____% of individual or team plans overemphasized short-term and medium-term outcomes over long-term outcomes

This refers to hyperbolic discounting, our tendency to prefer immediate gains over larger rewards later, even if the latter would be more beneficial in the long term. An orientation toward such short-term rewards in organizations - usually caused by problematic incentive structures for performance evaluation or external market pressure from investors - undermines long-term profitability.

Question 22

Of all times when someone claimed credit for themselves in a team project, in ____% cases they claimed more credit than they deserved

This refers to egocentric bias, our tendency to claim more credit for ourselves from successful joint projects than is accurate, and vice versa for failed projects. This tendency damages relationships within teams and exacerbates internal organizational politics, undercutting employee engagement, motivation, and retention.

Question 23

Of all times when there was clear evidence of a problematic situation, someone ignored it in ____% of cases

This refers to the ostrich effect, our tendency to deny clear negative facts. A study found that of all CEOs fired, over 20% are dismissed for failing to acknowledge negative information about an organization's performance. This tendency impacts people at all levels of the organization. Such failure results in further deterioration of performance, as needed organizational changes are not brought about.

Question 24

Of all times when a decision was evaluated, in ____% of times someone focused mainly on the outcomes rather than considering the quality of the decision-making process

This refers to the outcome bias, our tendency to evaluate decisions by their outcome rather than the quality of the process by which decisions were made. Even broken clocks are right twice a day, and failing to evaluate the process results in the highly problematic tendency of rewards such as promotions going to the lucky as opposed to the good. Of course, luck runs out, while quality persists: it's much more beneficial for an organization to reward and promote those who are good even when they are unlucky.

Question 25

Of all times when someone had to evaluate themselves, in ____% of situations they overestimated their positive qualities and underestimated their negative qualities

This refers to illusory superiority, our tendency to evaluate our positive qualities as better than they are, and dismiss our negative qualities. This tendency results in unnecessary team conflicts and internal politics.

Question 26

Of all situations when an outcome was being measured, in ____% of cases someone conflated the means used to measure an outcome with the outcome itself (i.e. equated employee responses on satisfaction surveys with actual level of employee satisfaction)

This refers to surrogation, our tendency to lose sight of the outcome that a specific measuring technique is supposed to evaluate, thus conflating the measure with the outcome. In an organization, the danger comes when those in positions of leadership mistakenly equate the various reports and statistics they receive to what those

reports and statistics are supposed to measure. For instance, a report on customer satisfaction does not equate to actual customer satisfaction: the report is only as good as the data that went into the report, combined with the biases of those who prepared the report. Especially problematic in larger organizations where the leadership is further away from the front lines, surrogation causes the leadership to try to improve the measure rather than the outcome - what gets measured gets managed - harming the organization's performance and profitability.

Question 27

Of all situations when someone had all the relevant information needed to make a decision, in ____% of cases they continued to request additional information before making the decision

This refers to the information bias, our tendency to seek more information than is needed to make decisions and take action. Organizations where information bias is common are characterized by paralysis through analysis, i.e., not taking actions and making decisions quickly enough and thus failing to compete effectively in the marketplace.

Question 28

Of all times when someone thought that others in the organization agreed with them, they were wrong in ____% of cases

This refers to the false consensus effect, our tendency to overestimate the extent to which other people share our beliefs, preferences, and conclusions, also known as typical mind fallacy. This tendency causes significant internal team conflict when these disagreements become apparent as the rubber hits the road on projects and decisions, and undermines employee motivation, engagement, and retention. It also causes organizations to make products and offer services that do not satisfy the needs of customers due to making unwarranted assumptions about how well they know their customers.

Question 29

Of all situations when an action was considered, in ____% of cases the costs of failing to act were not adequately considered

This refers to the omission bias, our tendency to judge harmful action as worse than harmful inactions (omissions to act). Harmful inactions - whether failing to address threats or take advantage of opportunities - are just as damaging to an organization's bottom line, reputation, and other assets as are harmful actions, and need to be treated the same.

Question 30

Of all times when someone was evaluating a situation and making a decision, in ____% of cases they underestimated the intensity of feelings of other people (employees, customers, vendors, or other stakeholders)

This refers to the empathy gap, our tendency to underestimate the intensity of feelings of people with whom we disagree or whom we do not see as belonging to the same group as we do. The empathy gap is one of the most insidious biases for organizations, as its occurrence is often hard to recognize, and it becomes apparent only when new internal changes or external offerings are met with great resistance, to the utter surprise of those behind the changes or offerings.

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