

COGNITIVE ERRORS IN SEARCHES

These are common cognitive errors that arise in search processes. They are a result of biases which we all hold. Such cognitive errors derail the work of a search committee as they focus energy on the biases rather than an objective review of an applicant's qualifications. As a result, decisions reflect the biases rather than the criteria.

Some common cognitive errors:

- **Negative or positive stereotypes.** These are discussed rather than attending to actual job application materials.
- **Raising the bar or shifting goal posts.** Demanding higher standards or more evidence from some candidates than others; often paired with denigrating value of accomplishments listed.
- **Elitism.** Emphasis on "quality" which often masks biases; ignores systemic factors which may result in mainstream candidates attending more elite institutions, for example.
- **Biased exception-making.** Not making exceptions for marginalized candidates that are made for mainstream candidates.
- **Fit obsession.** Obsession with "good fit" or "bad fit" over emphasis on job criteria. Fit implies comfort, implies similarity, implies lack of diversity. Difference between "fit" and "function." Different ways of working ought to be valued in an institution.
- **Overemphasis on first impressions.** Ignoring varying levels of comfort or different cultural ways of interacting that might produce a different impression. Overemphasizing first impressions reinforces an emphasis on fit.
- **The longing to clone.** The desire to reproduce an incumbent or an institutional norm leads to ignoring job ad criteria and actual requirements for the position.
- **Provincialism.** Not believing someone would want to come to your institution and thus, not taking seriously applications from diverse candidates.
- **Extraneous myths and assumptions.** Rather than attending to job ad or app materials, drawing on personal biases and the associated myths and assumptions to reinforce reasons not to hire someone.
- **Seizing on a pretext.** Over exaggerating one element of an application that you find problematic and ignoring the materials on balance. Includes blowing up isolated incidents during interviews out of context and attributing them to a defect in character rather than normal human needs or interpretations of what may have been asked or expected of the candidate.

(drawn from *Faculty Diversity: Removing the Barriers*, 2nd Edition by Joann Moody, 2012)