

Business essays - fundamental attribution bias



Fundamental Attribution Bias

Fundamental attribution bias (FAB) can also be referred to as correspondence bias or over attribution. This is the tendency of a person to overestimate the influence of personal factors which are inherent with the person and includes effort and ability and at the same time underestimate the influence of situational factors when giving a quick analysis of someone.

The tasks and luck forms the bulk of external influences. People tend to and it's very human to attribute certain exhibited behavior with the actors known characteristics while not determining the context which the behavior manifested. Fundamental attribution makes people error because it's based on own perceptions hence affects performance appraisal. It's the tendency to overestimate the importance of dispositional factors relative to situational influences (Arkes 1987, p, 11).

Fundamental attribution bias has been a phenomenon which has been in existence and studied by medieval writers up to the present and still generates a lot interest and research work. The work was first described by Aristotle that objects behavior could be attributed to the inherent characteristics held in the objects.

Later Galileo in 17th century was first able to coin the need to study the behavior of objects in relevance to the situation. Levin in 1931 advanced the importance of the interaction of people and environment in that he recognized that the exhibited behavior was a product of the said interaction. He can be termed as the first writer to explore the subject of correspondence bias and his theory can be summarized in an equation as follows below.

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Disposition = Behavior - Situation.

The equation demonstrates the value placed on interactions in relevance to behavior to behavior. Disposition is the process of synthesizing the observed behavior and inferring meaning. This can only be objective if it's visualized in the contexts of the situation.

An example of this assumption tendency in the work place is of an employee who is unable to perform a task and the manager attributes this to lack of effort but in the real sense it's the difficulty of the task that made him behave that way. This links us to explain the difficulty encountered while appraising performances.

When people are given a chance to judge others there is a tendency to be biased on the person especially if ones have a preconceived character of the person. FAB increase in individuals, if they do not have, the cognitive capacity, to adjust to spontaneous traits inferences to situational constraints. If someone is highly motivated and takes time to analyze the exhibited behavior then the process leads to less FAB (Gilbert and Malone 1995, p, 11).

At this stage it would be wise to define attribution as it will feature prominently in the paper. Attribution is a process whereby a behavior is observed, then determined through perception and finally judgment passed on the behavior. In order to assign a behavior to someone three components of attribution needs to be examined.

First is consistency of behavior if it's the same reaction when faced with the same circumstances if it's the same then consistency is high and vice versa.

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Second, is distinctiveness of behavior, if someone acts the same way in different situations then the behavior is distinctive. Lastly is on consensus and this regards group behavior if they show same tendency when exposed to similar environment (Pittman, 1989, p, 377).

Fundamental attribution bias occurs and currently there is no universally accepted explanation on why it occurs. Psychologists have associated it with perception and inability to analyze salient features. When we observe people they become the primary focal point hence exclude the external forces.

When we analyze ourselves we become aware of the situational forces hence we are able to assign an environmental cause to the exhibited behavior but not in others.

Many reasons have been advanced for FAB and various experiments been tried to explain it. FAB is the most researched and documented on bias in social perception. Since the year 1977 correspondence bias has been subject of high intrigues with many accounts finding a path to explain it from theoretical perspectives.

One experiment which tries to explain this phenomenon is by Ross, Amabile and Steinmetz (1997) whereby they used the quick role paradigm of quiz master, contestant and observer who were randomized interchangeably without knowing. Perceptions from the three roles played were noted and this demonstrated that fundamental biases were high from the point of the role play. (Gilbert and Malone, 1995) has categorized the reasons into three.

The first is lack of awareness of the prevailing situation. This limitation is brought about by the perceiver's inability to realize the external forces that

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come into fore play in behaviors hence aggravating biases. The situational forces are salient hence the observer may not be privy to them. In the context of a relationship this would change if we knew someone because would know them and their forces make them behave in a certain way (Gilbert, 1995 p, 9).

The second reason for continued research and experimentation of FAB is on unrealistic expectations. When FAB comes into play it makes the mind not to think systematically hence make unforced errors while passing judgments on others based only on their known characteristics. Reason needs to be the guiding principle while making decisions and not by what meets the eye. Individuals when faced by a multitude of choices then they have to make decisions on what is appropriate.

Research has shown that, man uses values and goals as yard sticks upon which problems can be evaluated. This approach opens up many possibilities of biases. When bias sets in the expectations becomes unrealistic in that already the mind has formed a picture of what is to be accomplished.

Cognitive science which is the study of the mind has revealed glaring biases in quantitative reasoning, social attribution and memory. The more aware of about our own biases the more quality decisions we will make when it comes to evaluating own and others performance (Langdrige, & Butt, 2004 p, 358).

The third reason by Gilbert is inflated categorization whereby it states that we influence others by the way we carry our talks and actions. People form mental pictures about us hence have their own perceptions of who we are.

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People tend to place persons into groups and for those whom they are acquainted with they give them preferences. Upon categorization whenever a person acts contrary to the known behavior then we can judge them based on the known characteristic but not on the prevailing situation. Observes judge the actors behavior not on the observed behavior but on the expected behavior.

Categorization of behavior ranges from simple to complex. The actor's perfect knowledge of the situation and ambiguous expectations based on learnt behavior. Categorization happens simultaneously, no conscious attention hence, not aware of inferential processes. An example is the experiment by Gilbert is on the film on a woman who was discussing politics and sex.

One group was informed about the topic before the film while the other was informed in the end . the group that was informed before the film could not infer the topic because of being inflated hence already formed a conclusion. The group that was told at the end could be able to infer because were keen on anxiety causing behavior (Gilbert & Malone, 1995, p, 16) & (Silvera, Moe, & Iversen, 2000 p, 109).

The fourth reason is incomplete correction-Lack of lack of cognitive resources and motivation. This is based on Sequential Operation Model(SOM) which was advanced by Gilbert, Pelham and Krull (Gilbert, 1988). The SOM Model attribution occurs in a sequence of three steps: step one is referred as categorization and it identifies behavior. Step two is characterization whereby initial disposition is made by association character with behavior.

The third on the model is correlation which is the situational adjustment in line with other constraints. The first two are like automatic response and individuals have little control. The last one is the one which is controlled and effortful in that the person takes time to make an analysis of behavior (Gilbert and Malone, 1995) & (Silvera, Moe and Iversa, 2000).

The correction process takes into account that the perceiver needs to have high cognitive value, motivated and take effort to make unprecedented analysis. FAB decreases significantly if the person is motivated enough a takes time to do some correlation efforts (Gilbert and Melone, 1995, p, 18) (Silvera, 2000, p, 110).

When individuals are cognitively busy some do not show biases inferring that certain individuals' tendencies of biases are low. Biases then cannot be attributed to groups but individual attribution process as each person may have a different perception on observed behavior. This difference can be traced to attribution complexity which some element of personality.

All a long we have been examining at the transition and reasons for advancement of FAB, but there should be factors that strengthens it hence its continued presence. The first is time as described by Burger in 1991 in that he disputed earlier assertions that FAB does not take into account the context of situation as time is increased, discrepancies in interpretations differ. Attributions tend to shift over time.

An experiment described by Burger is on students' reactions after being shown a video by a student on gun control. The students are informed that the speaker does not have a choice on which side to support. Later the <https://assignbuster.com/business-essays-fundamental-attribution-bias/>

students are informed of the speaker's choice and are asked to give opinions immediately after the video show and later after seven days. The initial responses confirmed FAB but after a seven day period had elapsed the students gave response based on situational analysis.

This shows that over time the perceivers mind synthesis information further and injects an element of situation which initially lacked hence FAB can be said to diminish over time. Other experiments have been described to determine the effect of time on FAB and include studies on perceptions prior to and after elections. Hedonic relevance does not retain the attribution shift (Truchot, 2003, p, 204).

The second factor of FAB strengthening is dependency which sets to describe role of motivation in inferences. Outcome dependency predicts behavior. People always would like to be able to predict the behavior and in so doing control it. Correspondence bias is reduced in situations whereby potential costs are implied hence need to take time before deciding on an action. Inferences in such situations are high.

Time reduces correspondence biases significantly as one has the effort to analyze the context of the situation. If the aim of an inference is to imply group impression then correspondence bias is decreased since any drastic actions would affect group performance. The correspondence influence theory states that attributions about other are clear manifestations of personal interests of the perceiver and has a motivational aspect (Vonk, 199, p, 381).

Studies have been done to determine whether full knowledge of situation can prevent biases. These studies have demonstrated a key element in human nature that biases are always bound to happen hence it's upon organizations to find ways of always factoring in biases even were appraisers are fully informed on the environment.

Studies which have been highlighted in this paper point to the significant role played by FAB in organizations. Since appraisals are based on judgment on observed behavior then it should be affected by FAB hence it's discussed in the proceeding paragraphs. Performance appraisal is also termed employee appraisal as it's a method of evaluating the job of employees based on the set parameters. It's a review on the progress of the employee Vis a Vis the organization.

Its roots can be traced to the 20th century though no one can place an exact date as it's a phenomenon that sprung spontaneously. It has become quite inevitable and all organizations worldwide have adopted it as tool of management and other functions. In its absence the organization cannot be able to gauge the success and knowledge gaps of its workforce.

The human nature of judging others especially under influence fundamental attribution bias can have impeding consequences on the organization in terms of motivation, ethics and legal problems (Jawahar, 2005, p, 11).

The performance appraisal serves several purposes including giving feedback on employees track record. It's used to identify knowledge gaps hence implementing trainings. Also serves as criteria upon which rewards are allocated to employees together with salary and allowances. The

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performance appraisal serves as tool for organizational diagnosis on its development path.

Lastly is that it's used for communication within the organization while at the same time for validating the staffing process. Performance appraisals are filled by the employees, supervisors, customers and other stakeholders. As earlier indicated man makes a construed perception hence can use it pass judgments that can hamper operations of the organization.

Effects of fundamental attribution bias on appraisal performance

Fundamental attribution bias has been demonstrated through research and theory that it affects observed performance. Situational factors can enhance or deter performance hence can largely go unnoticed by the observer and leading to wrong attribution. If raters continue to act under fundamental attribution bias without having a compensatory mechanism then their appraisals won't be valid. Performance appraisal needs to be viewed as a means of assessing and keeping track of staff performance.

Employee performance and continued competitive edge of the organization are pivotal issues bordering on human resource and total quality management. The scales which are used to measure performance in an organization need to be reliable and valid. These two components determine whether the organization has adequate mechanisms to address discrepancies which may arise out of individual inferences. The appraisal tool need to be all inclusive as it's used to determine the organizations wage structures, job groups, promotions and as tool to measure effectiveness of organizations tools (Jawahar, 2005, p, 7).

A form of universality on the factors that influence employee performance has been established through the studies and experimentations. These factors are knowledge gaps, abilities and level of motivation. FAB does affect these mentioned hence the persons involved in filing and designing the appraisal forms need to factor in situations influences so as to have a representative appraisal (Jawahar, 2005, p, 6).

Many organizations have always made the ultimate mistakes of assuming that individual opinions are always correct without evaluating the situational context. For performance appraisal ratings to be deemed reliable and carry validity in them organizations need to incorporate the influence of interactive forces on the performance being evaluated on employees.

The effect on determination of job expectations

Job expectations are a systematic, quantitative measure of what a worker is supposed to attain at the end of a given period. This can be determined at the organizational or departmental or team level but emphasis is placed on expected results. The drawers of the expectations always use their perceptions based on past experiences. Many a times the rotors place too many expectations on the precinct that the worker will be able to do it. When the worker is unable to accomplish set tasks then he is judged that he could be lazy but may be the tasks are beyond their scope.

The effect on job description

Job description states clearly what the job entails and what duties accompany it. Perceptions are mental pictures hence individual perceptions of the person executing the job many a times determines how a job is

described. One rater may place the job as demanding while to another it may appear a simple task.

Conclusion

The role of FAB in appraisal cannot be underestimated though further studies need to be done in order to have convergence on the issue. Yes its recognized that individual perception do affect the gauging of performance and it can be positive or negative hence both need to be determined empirically.

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