

Pause Your Judgement and Notice the Beauty

I had a wonderful experience the other day that reminded me of my own biases and judgements. I got to see them clearly, and the beauty that exists in those I might judge. I was richer for the increased awareness.

I caught the train into Wellington city and one of the conductors collecting tickets walked along and clicked each ticket and said in a very robotic, short, sharp fashion, "Thank you." He was stern looking and seemed quite stiff in his body. Click. "Thank you". Click. "Thank you." Click. "Thank you." My judgement: he was bored to tears and going through a learned process or routine. Then magic happened. He finished the ticketing process and stopped to chat with a small group. His whole being softened. His face lit up. He changed roles and was instantly a bright, engaging, excited and friendly character. In that moment, for me, he shifted from being alien and difficult to fathom to a beautiful and vibrant human being. I got to see the problem with my own biases and judgements.

Judgement is a very natural survival- and fear-based process that occurs within milliseconds of meeting anyone. It enables us to simplify the complexity of life and make decisions quickly. It was massively helpful when walking around a corner and meeting a sabre toothed tiger or a mammoth, or a strange cave person.



A beautiful example of a steam locomotive

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Abstract

Judgement is an essential capacity for survival that gets overused in ways that diminish from the value available to us from others.

Keywords

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It does help us now as well. Is this a hostile or a friendly audience? Is my customer pleased to see me, irritated, or angry? Judgement is natural and essential. It is not always accurate. Some of our judgements are biases we have learned, as children from our parents or from our own experiences. Often they are very contextual and then get applied generally. They limit our openness to others, particularly those we judge as different.

A friend of mine, who has some clear understanding of some of his biases, was taking his daughter to choose a new school. In meeting with the principal, he heard, paraphrased, "We are largely a white school". His response: "I may be a racist but that doesn't mean my daughter has to be." They went looking for a different school.

Research highlights that diversity in our teams and organisations creates an environment where we get better solutions and results. The varied opinions, experiences, thinking processes, however annoying we may find them from time to time, create variation that challenges and improves the outcomes.

I remember an organisation that decided project managers must be Myers-Briggs ENTJ. Any other type was excluded from being a project manager. Their projects all had a common look and feel, and failed to respond to variation in a similar fashion. It is difficult to learn from others when those others are the same as you. In a different organisation I had consulted with them for several months, and had worked with the manager in a different context for several years. Then, because he was considering offering me a permanent role, he had me psychometrically assessed. I did well in all the cognitive and behavioural aspects, but he turned me down for the role because, in his opinion my Myers-Briggs suggested I was a business analyst, not a project manager. That was a thoroughly unscientific judgement based on his own misuse of the tool. This was in spite of him having observed me as a successful project manager

in a variety of different contexts over the years we had known each other.

What challenges are you aware of in building diversity and inclusion in your teams and organisations? What benefits have you noticed? What judgements get in your way? Do you surround yourself with those you feel comfortable with or do you actively engage with those who are different from you, who may challenge your ideas? What value is lost when there is a push for sameness rather than diversity?