

Bias and Trusting Others

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How can we trust others if we are holding a bias about them? Are we authentically trusting ourself or others if we are holding a bias which we do not acknowledge?

Bias is a major challenge to trust in many ways. We ought to approach carefully to ensure that bias is dealt with efficaciously. First some assumptions:

1. **Bias is both good and bad.** Bias is prejudice, an opinion that is based on something other than actual understanding, knowledge or experience. Bias is either in favor of, or against something, person, or group compared with another.

Notice that bias can be either in favor of or against. Often when we hear the words bias or prejudice they have a negative (against) connotation. However, one can have a bias toward or in favor of something. Either way, bias is harmful because it is not accurate, not truthful, and does not give an authentic understanding or feeling. Therefore, in the context of trust we consider all bias as something that we ought to acknowledge, understand, and moderate to the best of our ability.

To have resonant trust: a) **analysis** ought to come as close as possible to the authentic, accurate, honest understanding and feeling of the other; b) with the **risk** being just 'how much bias has been included' in ones' perspective.

A primary consideration is: just what and how much bias do we carry given our deeply held beliefs, values, and faith; or, on the other hand how much are we missing due to lack of awareness, partial knowledge, and minimal experience? Further, how are these biases seen by others in a life-promoting context?

2. **Everyone is biased.** We can assume that no one is free of bias. We are all biased, and those who are determining our trustworthiness are also biased. Which leaves us with the questions: "Who can we trust? And, on what can we rely?"

In our personal reality bias-balancing processes are held sacred — not inputs or outputs, not cherished assumptions or results. No one is immune from their beloved beliefs (or "identity-protective perceptions"). We all hold a belief in something. Our beliefs guide our behaviors, motivates us, and helps us maintain sanity. These beliefs (biases) are often positive, good, life enhancing. Therefore the question now is: "What do you believe." We are getting closer to the truth, to your authenticity as you define what it is that you believe. You are moving toward self-trust as you edge closer to articulating and accepting your biases (good, bad, or indifferent).

Beliefs are by no means universally agreed upon. And faith in reality, our trust rests on incomplete logic and near-utopian and/or biased subjective assumptions. Maybe that's OK... if your level of trust in plausible theory-faith (beliefs); that beats empirical facts. However in more trustworthy arenas, new facts must oust old certainties which then alter and/or change your biases. New perceptions ought to create a moderating effect on your biases.

3. **Bias tends to make individuals and groups more insular.** Witness the low trust levels in the US today (Edelman, 2018) and what is happening in our culture. People are turning inward and rallying around beliefs they dearly hold. Although variation does exist by community and between individual people, if an individual no longer trusts social institutions to regulate society, that individual will find other means. Turning inward is one path they often take.

It's just easier to trust in-group members, so you end up defaulting to that even though you may value equality and diversity. If you add that up across lots of interactions, you could still have a great deal of discriminatory outcomes even though you've got a lot of positively motivated people.

Consider the role proxemics plays in trust relationships. We literally are closer to those we know, understand, agree with, and trust. We seek a comfortable amount of space contingent upon levels of trust. Those we really trust, we hold close. Those that we do not trust we hold at a distance, build walls to separate, and look for ways to segregate.

4. **In Bias We Trust: It's Easier Than Ever To Dismiss Inconvenient Truths.** Writer Dorian Fox coined that phrase as he penned the following story: "A few summers ago, while on a long road trip across America, I visited the National Museum of Natural History in Washington. My girlfriend and I eventually found ourselves at a glass case with three skeletons inside: one Homo sapiens, one Homo erectus and one Neanderthal.

A teenage girl sidled up to the exhibit. She wore a T-shirt with the name of a school or church on it; she seemed to be part of a large tour group. "Yeah right," she said, looking at the Neanderthal's remains, disgust in her voice. "That's fake." She scowled at the anthropological specimen. The skull grinned back. She was convinced it was a trick meant to deceive her.

In the weeks that followed, I thought of that teenager often, first with my own brand of disgust (That poor dumb kid! Brainwashed with those anti-Darwinian lies!) and then, later, with deeper curiosity realized that we all have our slants on reality."

All of us seem willing to dismiss what we don't want to believe while clinging to the beliefs (biases) we hold. Clearly Dorian and the teenage girl held differing beliefs (biases). The point here being: how could these two people develop a trust relationship?

5. **Recognize and accept your biases and hold them appropriately.** In brief, we need to first confront our own personal biases each time we move toward a trust relationship. What biases do you have about your-self? What biases do you have about others? Do you know how to confront and align your biases?

We suggest that it is advantageous to utilize bias to build trust. Following are six steps to utilize bias. Do this first for yourself to ensure self-trust, then follow the same six steps with others are you enter a trusting relationship:

- **State your biases.** Articulate your position on whatever it is that you believe. This is not easy. Biases are like foreheads — it's easier to see others' than your own. Often owning our own biases requires tools. Strategies such as this one may be helpful, and you may have to repeat it several times. Stay positive, each cycle will bring you closer to you biases. First state a bias.

- **Explore your feelings about the stated bias.** Does the bias make you feel good? How does acting on the value make others feel? At what stage do your behaviors become destructive to yourself or to others? How would you feel if the bias becomes exaggerated? How would you feel if you lost this bias? Exploring your feelings has no right or wrong answers. Your feelings are what they are. Accept them at this point. Disclose everything to yourself. Disclose what is necessary and appropriate to others.
- **Shared Goals:** there are two dimensions to shared goals; the first dimension is aligning your own goals to ensure consistency within your own beliefs (biases). The other dimension is determining alignment between your biases and the biases of others with whom you seek a trust relationship. Here you are looking for alignment, compatibility, congruence upon what you can agree. Be sure to explore how the bias may potentially undermine your relationship.
- **Commit to what you agree upon.** Clearly state the commitment, make it public, write it out if necessary. Establish a 'we agree' statement; commit to it.
- **Build the trust relationship.** As you live out your commitment practice increasing levels of trust. Gently extend the risk, analyze later. Risk ought to be extended in minimal ways to ensure it does not outpace analysis. However, risk first.
- **Evaluate, celebrate, know resonant trust.** Review, reflect, discuss progress. Celebrate your results. Appreciate the other in the relationship. Re-examine your bias. Reinforce your beliefs. Share how your biases, your beliefs, are exercised in life-enhancing ways. Know that everyone is benefiting.

In sum, good or bad, we all are biased. Further, people are more inclined to trust members of a group with which they affiliate, and less inclined to trust someone from a group other than their own. The aforementioned six steps may be best practiced with individuals that you already trust enabling you to practice the necessary skills prior to deeper challenges.

There's nothing wrong with holding passionate opinions / beliefs / biases. However, we often do horrible things while imagining that we are doing something noble, and vice versa. Therefore without a willingness to reach for some common ground or admit that an opposing position or perspective could be true, any hope of resonant trust dies.