The Status Quo Bias and You

What is it and where does it come from?

What is the Status Quo Bias?

We stick with what we know, even if it's not ideal and change would be beneficial.

Why does this happen?

- We're lazy and want to conserve energy. Evaluating new things takes brainpower.
- We're loss averse; if something feels risky, we'll avoid it.
- We're pot-committed to the current state, we've invested so much in the current state, why change?
- We want to avoid mistakes and irreversible decisions.

Why is this a problem?

Because we're predisposed to stick with the status quo, we may:

- ignore the disadvantages of the default or status quo
- miss out on opportunities that are beneficial to us
- stop ourselves from trying new things
- hinder innovation and creative problem solving.

How it might sound at work

That's just how we do things here.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it // Let's not reinvent the wheel.

We tried that once—it didn't work.

We've always used this system // But this is part of our culture.

What if we change and it goes wrong?

Let's wait and see what others do first.

People might not like it.

This could open a can of worms // It feels too risky right now.

That's not how I've been doing it for the last 10 years.

Are you saying what we've been doing is wrong?

Changing this would undo a lot of what we've built.

So, what can we do about it? Try these 3 team activities:

1. WHAT'S FLEXIBLE?

First, be transparent about what can, and cannot, be flexed. Business necessities cannot be flexed -- everything else can.

A business necessity *is anything that* ***has*** *to be done a certain way: health + safety, regulation/ legal, could risk losing your customers, your money-making or your funding.*

But really test this - does it *actually* need to be done this way or is that just how we've always done it? Consider how Covid shattered the in-person-5-days-a-week-status quo:

Before Covid	After Covid
Business Necessity: Work in the office to collaborate together	**Business Necessity:** Collaborate/work together **Opportunity to Flex:** Where/when/how people do this

FOR OUR TEAM:

Business necessities for your team	Opportunities to flex

2. CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

- **HIGHLIGHT THE DISADVANTAGES.** Frame the status quo as a loss. This will trigger people's loss aversion impulses. Highlight the problems of sticking with the status quo to influence change.

Our status quo: rules / processes/ givens	Disadvantages of how we currently do things:

- **REVERSE THE RULES.** List out your common rules, processes or 'givens' in your team. Then flip them.
    - *What if we did the opposite?*
    - *Remove the status quo altogether. What if we couldn't do it the same way?*
    - *What do we never question around here—but should?*

Our status quo: rules / processes/ givens	FLIP IT AROUND

- **HOLD A PRE-MORTEM.** You can do this at any stage of your work to challenge your assumptions.

Imagine we get to the end of this work and it failed spectacularly. Why?

Why might this fail?	Actions to address possible fail points

3. ACTIVELY SEEK OUT NEW PERSPECTIVES

Seek new perspectives. Then, challenge yourself not to dismiss them immediately. It's different, and System 1 rarely likes different.

But, we all think and approach challenges / issues in specific ways. Using a model like Edward De Bono's *Thinking Hats* can help people look at ideas from angles they usually avoid or ignore. Status quo bias thrives on habitual, one-note thinking. The hats bust that open.

You can assign people different hats/approaches or work through them each as a team.

De Bono's 6 thinking hats: Can the problem be viewed / solved with...

White Hat: Facts	data and information
Red Hat: Feelings	feelings, intuition, emotions
Green Hat: Creativity	new, innovative ideas and creative approaches
Yellow Hat: Optimism	positive view of the situations and opportunities
Black Hat: Caution	critical and deliberate judgement, risk assessments
Blue Hat: Control	processes, templates, decisions and plans

Each hat challenges the status quo by asking different questions:

- **What data supports keeping things the same? / changing?**
- **How do you feel about this?**
- **What else is possible that we haven't tried?**
- **What could go right if we made this change?**
- **What are the actual risks we need to plan for?**
- **How should we structure our thinking to keep us moving forward?**

Other prompts to elicit different perspectives:

- *We all seem to agree. Let's consider the three reasons this won't work...*
- *If you had to argue the opposite viewpoint, what would you say?*
- *How might this look from your teammate's/employee's/customer's perspective?*
- *What's another valid way to interpret what's happening here?*
- *What's one perspective that makes you uncomfortable, but might contain some truth?*
- *Looking back a year from now, what perspective do you think you'll wish you had considered?*
- *Who else could provide insight that you haven't considered yet?*