



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (Dona Lewandowski)(#15)

Author : Mike Smith

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Last week we had another round of Faculty Lunches with the Dean, and like all of the others it was interesting and enjoyable. The group included Mark Botts, Greg Allison, Dona Lewandowski, and Trey Allen. Greg emailed later to say that it “was one of the most enjoyable and informative low-key chill times I have had in a while.” I completely agree. I’m so glad that these lunches emerged as a part of the strategic foresight process. This post is about the work shared by Dona, and I will write about the others in the coming days.



Dona Lewandowski



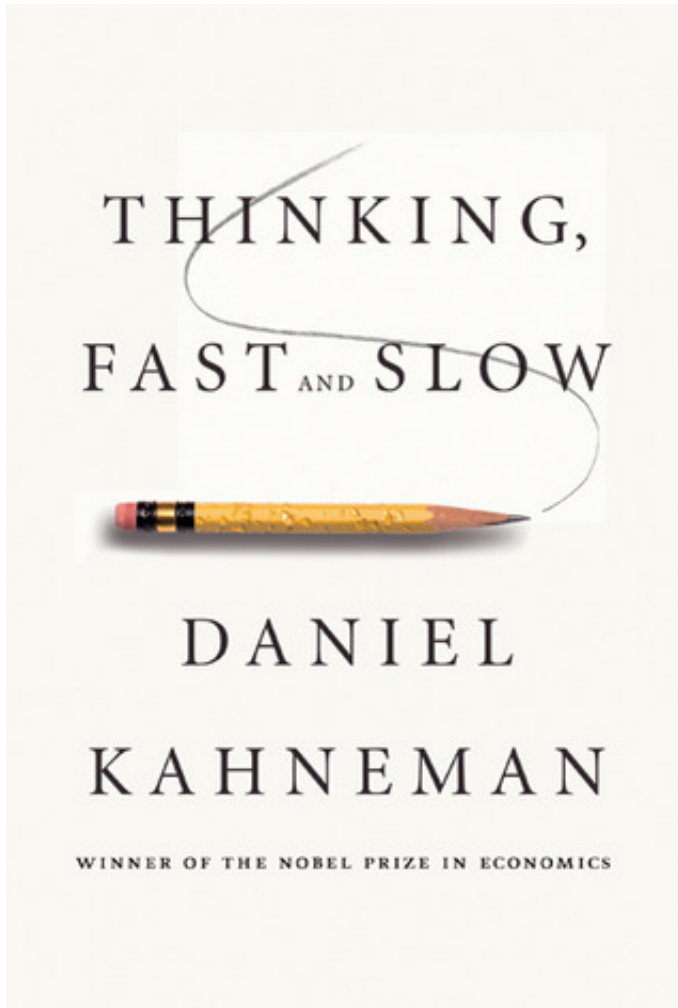
Dona Lewandowski. After teaching the topic of implicit bias for a number of years, Dona talked about how her conceptualization of the topic has changed—and how that has changed her teaching.

She began by talking about “[the replication crisis](#),” which refers to the inability of scientists in many fields to replicate the results of earlier research that had been considered established. For example, [researchers were unable to replicate a well-known study](#) showing that “adopting a power pose could alter your hormone levels and make you more bold.” The crisis is especially prevalent in psychology and some of the research underlying Dona’s earlier work on implicit bias was called into question. This whole crisis, which I somehow had missed, is [a fascinating topic](#).

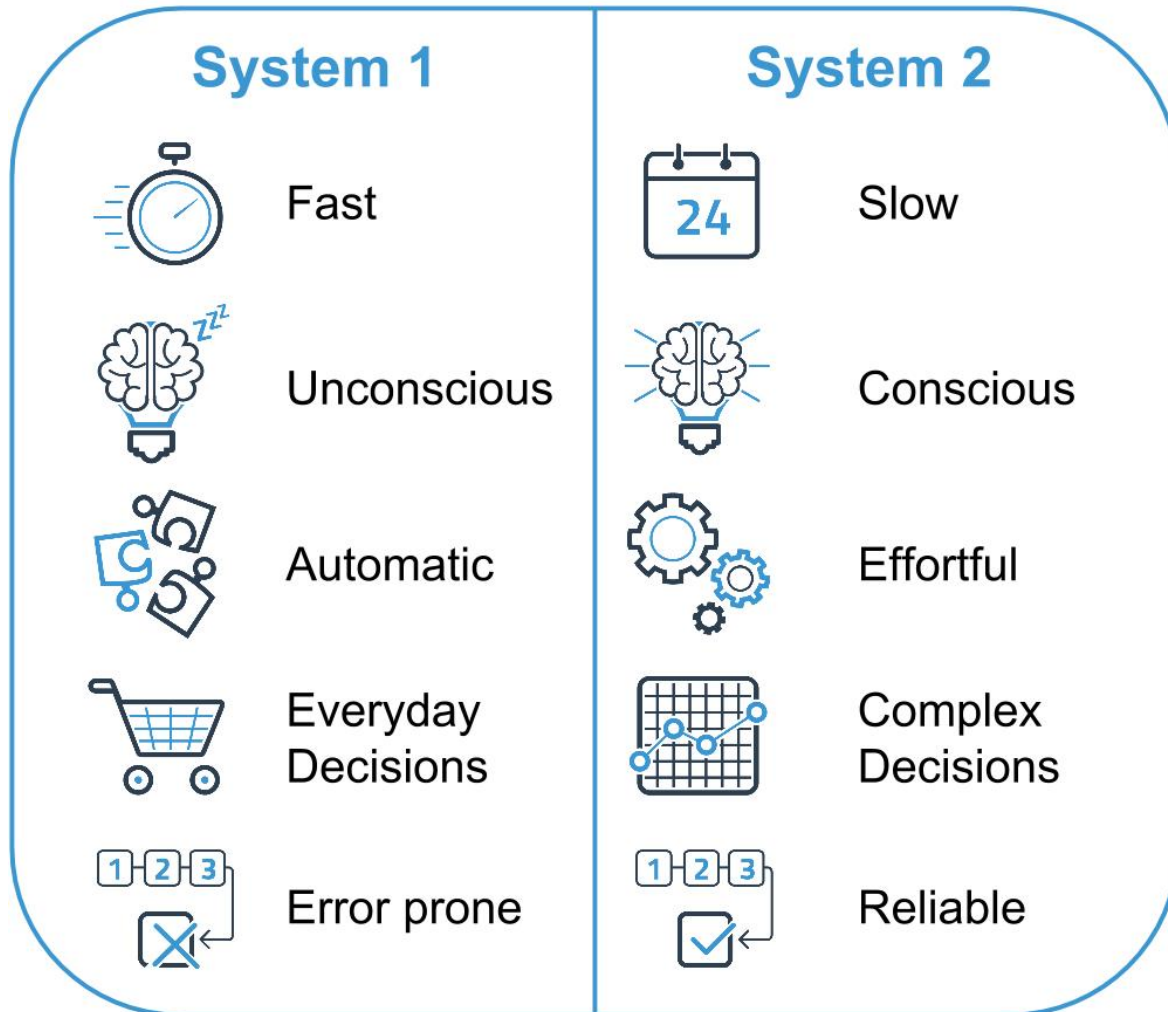
Dona’s other reason for revising her approach is that the concept of implicit bias itself has become politicized. For many the subject of bias has come to be framed primarily as about “race” or “social justice,” rather than how bias may be implicit in any number of different contexts. Students in Dona’s classes who were negatively inclined toward the social justice movement had started to demonstrate implicit bias toward the topic of implicit bias. It ironically was making it more difficult for them to see potential examples of implicit bias in their own work.



Dona feels like she is approaching the topic more effectively by relying on the highly-regarded work of Daniel Kahneman as set out in [Thinking, Fast & Slow](#). Kahneman won a Nobel Prize for his body of work on so-called slow thinking and fast thinking. Fast thinking operates automatically with little or no effort—which is necessary for getting through the day, but it also means that your mind looks for short-cuts and falls back onto all sorts of biases. Slow thinking is more deliberate and recognizes that there may be more going on than what you can quickly see and understand. It also requires more work and energy.



Kahneman offers lots of examples in his book. If you hear “ $2 + 2 =$ ”, your mind automatically responds “4.” That’s fast thinking. If you hear “ $24 \times 17 =$ ”, however, your mind switches to slower thinking. Let’s say you are asked the following question: “How many animals of each kind did Moses take on the Ark?” Fast thinking answers “Two.” Slow thinking is more likely to say “You’re trying to fool me. It was Noah.” The difference between Moses and Noah doesn’t matter much in the abstract, but it could make a major difference if you jump to the wrong kinds of conclusions in a criminal case. Fast thinking can be a bad thing if you are a magistrate or a judge hearing lots of cases without forcing yourself to slow down and reflect. According to Kahneman, “[t]he best we can do is a compromise: learn to recognize situations in which mistakes are likely and try harder to avoid significant mistakes when the stakes are high.”



Dona is using Kahneman's work to help magistrates and judges see the potential impact of fast thinking on their decision-making. She is finding that the concepts are simpler and more accessible to the students than her earlier teaching about implicit bias—partly because they can recognize fast and slow thinking in their daily lives. Dona also is finding that students are more open to finding strategies that avoid the problems caused by fast thinking. Her new approach avoids some of the defensiveness that I've seen in sessions on implicit bias, at least partly because it addresses implicit bias in a way that seems less judgmental and avoids natural (and ideological) resistance to the concept. According to Dona, this new approach "feels more integrated and closer to The Truth when I teach it."

Kudos to Dona for continuing to think hard about how best to serve her clients, and for changing when there appeared to be a better way to meet their needs. One reason we have so many great teachers at the School is because people are continuously challenging themselves to get even better.