Twitter Thread by Shreyas Doshi

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Why does Your Manager's Manager (YMM) request a deck/doc during a meeting, says it's urgent, and then doesn't respond for days after you create & send it?

Or, why does YMM often respond with trivial feedback (e.g. formatting) & not substantive feedback?

Answers in this thread■■

Have you set an entirely new password on a site & said to yourself: "surely, I'll remember it becos this site is so important for me". Have you then gone on to forget that password the very next week?

Me too.

The reason for YMM's odd behavior & my password optimism is the same.

That reason is the Focusing Illusion, first described by Daniel Kahneman.

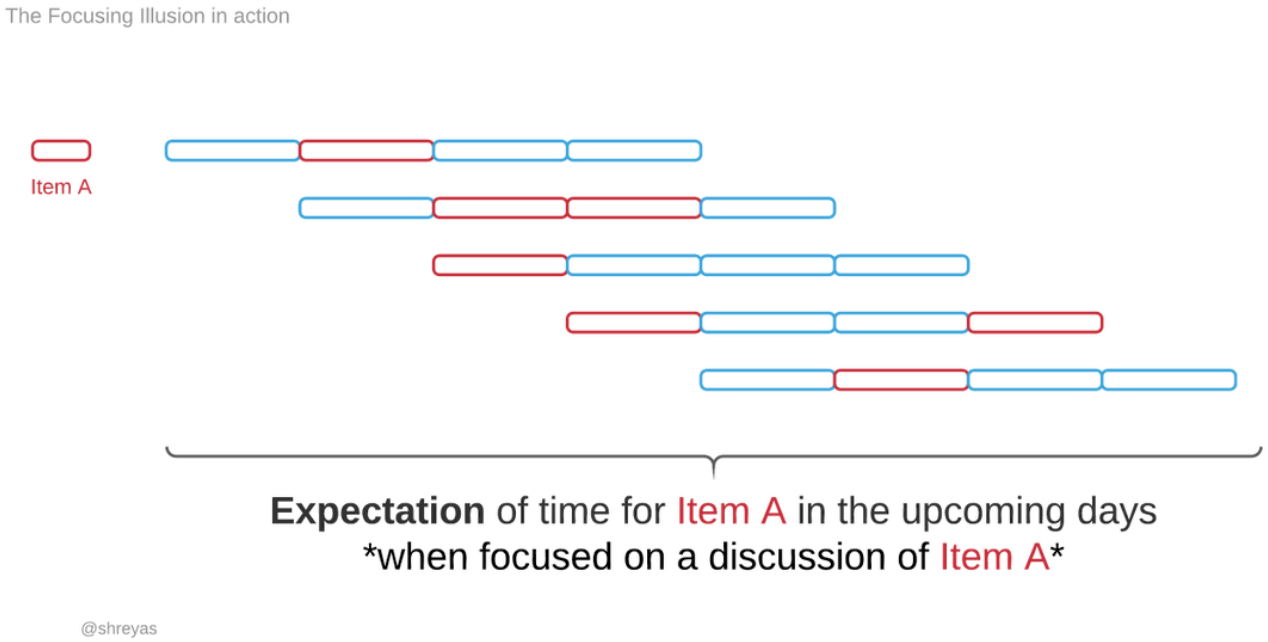
The Focusing Illusion:
Nothing in life is as important as you think it is while you are thinking about it.

When YMM asked you to create that doc as one of the follow up actions during the Product Review, YMM fell prey to the Focusing Illusion.

Trust me, YMM had no intention of making you do busywork.

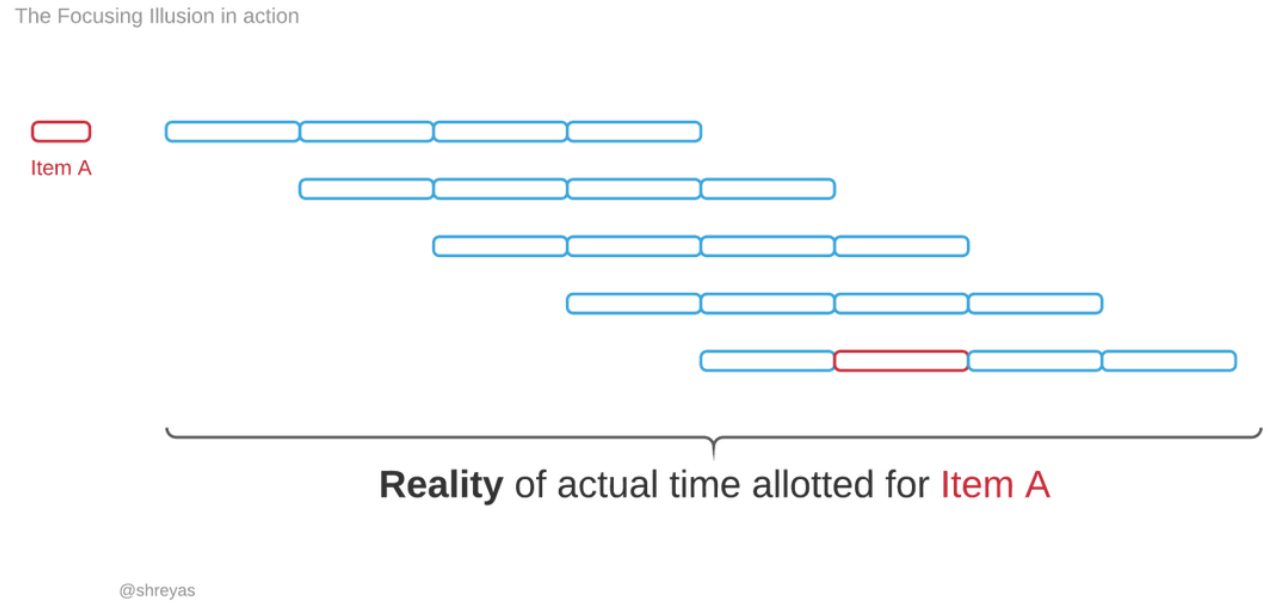
YMM truly believed that it was very impt & urgent to create that doc & review it.

This was YMM's conception of how much of their future time was appropriate to spend on the item for which they requested that doc (Item A):



Sadly, this is the reality of how much time it made sense for YMM to spend on Item A when the YMM left the meeting and was subsequently no longer focused on it:

(so now you know why it took weeks for YMM to respond even though YMM had requested it for next Monday)



And this is not just a YMM issue.

Ever been to a meeting with a passionate debate on a topic, many action items (AIs) get created as a result, you enthusiastically take on a bunch of those AIs, & then you fail to make progress on them for weeks on end?

Me too. Focusing Illusion

Alright, let's take a different situation.

Say YMM responds promptly, but with trivial feedback (formatting, typos, structural suggestions). Doesn't approve nor disapproves the proposal.

YMM hardly talks about the main substance of your proposal.

Sound familiar?

What gives?

Several possibilities here, but the main one is Bikeshedding.

Bikeshedding aka Parkinson's law of triviality says that people in an organization commonly give disproportionate weight to trivial issues while ignoring more substantive issues & decisions.

https://t.co/qNsY1ACX3m

Bikeshedding is so prevalent that a secret "best practice" for increasing chances of getting approval for your proposal is to *intentionally* plant an obvious minor issue in your mockups so the VP can point it out (after that the VP will leave you & your team alone for the rest).

(don't actually do that■■)

Moving on, could there be other reasons than just Bikeshedding & the Focusing Illusion for YMM's inability or unwillingness to pay adequate attention to the proposal or to the decision you need them to make?

Yes there are other reasons, but you won't like most of them.

Sometimes, YMM doesn't respond on time, doesn't engage as deeply, doesn't decide as quickly as you'd like because:
■■

1)
YMM doesn't think your proposal is any good (e.g. has *so much* feedback for improvement that YMM doesn't have time to give you all that feedback)

In this situation, YMM might tell your manager (YM), but might not know how to tell you.

(this doesn't make it right, I know)
■■

2)
YMM has new information that nullifies or drastically changes either the importance of your proposal or the substance of your recommendations.

Again, YMM might tell YM about it but it might not be safe to share broadly just yet.
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3)
None of the above is true, but YMM just doesn't want to or is afraid to make any decisions right now.

YMM might not be able to muster up the courage/vulnerability to say that to you or to YM.

Like the Ostrich Effect.

(again, this doesn't make it right, just sharing reality)

So what can be done about all of this?

1) You can't do much on your own (sorry)

2) Your company's leaders need to understand the Focusing Illusion & Bikeshedding & need to accept that they aren't immune to those

3) YM needs to take a more active role in holding YMM accountable

Lastly, it's useful to apply the Play-it-Out technique when a new artifact or more data analysis is requested in a meeting.

With Play-it-Out, you are required to describe upfront how you'll use said artifact/data & how different possibilities will lead to different decisions.

It's time to go, so I'll leave you with this:

This stuff is hard.

But with mature leaders & middle managers, it can be solved if we can understand the underlying tendencies that cause us at times to behave in irrational & irritating ways.

All the best to you, to YM & to YMM
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https://t.co/w5wrkWVnFI

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— Shreyas Doshi (@shreyas) December 30, 2020