“Quick and dirty” heuristics refer to the process in taking shortcuts to make a decision. By taking a shortcut, I mean that an exhaustive approach, such as thoroughly looking at information regarding the decision that is not readily available, is not taken. (1) I will be discussing examples of three heuristics: the representativeness heuristic, the familiarity heuristic, and naïve diversification.

In using the representativeness heuristic, people judge how likely something is to be true by comparing it to a representation of it that is already in their minds. (2) An example of this might be of a jury member judging whether a criminal is guilty. The jury member might have a representation in their minds of what a criminal looks like and would be quick to decide based on how similar the person looks to it. This can be effective in cases where a person has experience in the field in which they are making decisions. For example, if the jury member knew of common facial characteristics that a person lying about a crime might make, they could use this representation to determine whether the accused criminal is lying or not.

The familiarity heuristic can involve using familiar behavior in a new situation. For example, let’s suppose a person tells a joke at a party, and everyone laughs at the joke. At the next party the person attends, the person would come to the decision that the joke would have the same outcome, even if the party has different guests who may or may not find it funny. Though, this heuristic can be effective if a person is unsure of how to act in a new situation. It provides a quick idea of how to act in a new situation.

Lastly, naïve diversification refers to a heuristic where, when a person needs to choose several things at one moment, a person will choose a diverse set of options. (3) An example would be an investor who wants to invest in assets. With naïve diversification, they would equally choose several different assets rather than weighing out the best possible investments. This can be effective in a situation where the outcomes can’t be foreseen. By investing in all possible options, you raise the probability of hitting at least one good decision.

All in all, representativeness heuristic, familiarity heuristic and naïve diversification provide cognitive systems with a quick strategy to decide. In some cases, as discussed above, these heuristics can result in the best outcome.

References: