



# Understand & counteract your biases

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## I'm biased...are you?

If you have a brain, you have bias. We all have bias; it's part of being human.

**Our biases are our instantaneous thoughts, feelings and opinions of situations, people, environments and new ideas.**



Our goal is not to eliminate all of our biases – that would be impossible. Bias is wired into our thinking. Our goal should be to make sure our biases aren't negatively impacting:

- our decisions.
- other people and their inclusion.
- our workplaces.

**Our biases are both blessings and curses.**

Positively, biases help us make decisions and respond to things. Our biases affect how we perceive situations, how we listen, how we remember things and how we connect with others.

As a result, we tend to respond in particular ways – to people, ideas and situations.

Negatively, our biases can lead us to be closed-minded: to stereotype people, to discriminate and to exclude people, ideas or perspectives.

In terms of creating a diverse and inclusive culture, the unconscious brain is one of the biggest challenges for organisations and leaders in the 21st century.

–NIELSON AND KAPINSKI

## Conscious Biases

A feeling, perception or opinion of people or situations which is known to us. **Just a few words can elicit some strong reactions:** *anti-vaxxers, Donald Trump supporters, the Wallabies, lawyers.*

Visually seeing people and environments can elicit even stronger reactions.

## Unconscious Biases

**Unconscious biases are built up over many years and influenced by our backgrounds, social norms, expectations, family influences, culture and experiences growing up.** We all internalise some of this without realising it.

We all use these categories—of people, places, and things— to make sense of our world.

## Why do biases exist?

Our brains are doing a lot of work, constantly. They're fundamentally our survival organs. To help us survive, our brains focus on:

- conserving energy
- pattern seeking and
- meaning making.

**These three factors contribute to our biases:**

- To conserve energy we take mental shortcuts.
- We create these shortcuts by finding patterns and assigning meaning to these patterns.
- These assigned meanings form our biases.

While we all have biases, how they show up can be particular to the individual.

# We're diverse, the goal is inclusion

There's a quote by Verna Myers often used in these types of discussions: *Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance.* I've even heard a third part - *And belonging is being allowed to design your own dance.* It may be a little cheesy, but the spirit of the quote is sound.

Diversity and inclusion are not the same. If diversity is the *what*, inclusion is the *how*.

## Let's be clear on a few things:

1. We all have things that make us diverse.
2. Our goal is to be inclusive - where everyone has the opportunity to be their best.
3. We're all biased. Biases are inherent in how our brains function.
4. Our natural biases can unconsciously result in exclusive, unequal, inequitable environments at work - so they need to be addressed.

## Diversity: What you're bringing into a situation

We like using the I-C-E-S model of diversity. It broadly defines all the aspects that make people diverse, unique individuals. Check out the next page and have a go at filling this in for yourself.

Our ICES 'imprint' is like a snowflake, we're each beautifully unique. And each of the four areas of ICES has associations that trigger our biases.

## What is inclusion?

What we're really trying to do is build inclusive teams and workplaces. What is inclusion?

The Diversity Council of Australia defines four elements of individual inclusion at work. People are:

- **RESPECTED** for who they are and able to be themselves;
- **CONNECTED** to their colleagues and they feel they belong;
- **CONTRIBUTING** their perspectives and talents to the workplace; and
- **PROGRESSING** their capabilities, role and career at work (and have equal access to opportunities and resources).



Inclusion, or exclusion, is not a one time thing. It's a feeling in particular environments at particular times.

Which means, examining our own practices, ways of working and decision making for inclusion is not a one time thing; it's a constant reflection individually and as a team.

## Your 'ICES' of diversity

ICES & Examples	Your examples
<p><b>Identity</b> groups formed by shared identities or values</p> <p>Ethnicity, gender, age / generation, lifestage, religion, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status, body type, physical abilities, clothing styles, hobbies, preferences, family relationships, political affiliation.</p>	
<p><b>Cognitive</b> the way you think and how you communicate what you think. Your cognitive processes, capabilities and preferences.</p> <p><i>Introvert vs extrovert, big picture vs detail, beliefs vs facts, structured vs flexible, communication styles, memory capabilities, feelings/people or processes/outcomes. Think of these as a continuum, not one or the other.</i></p>	
<p><b>Experiences</b> your lived experiences, values and traditions, positive and negative associations based on experiences, how these experiences have shaped your path and outlook</p>	
<p><b>Skills &amp; Strengths</b> what you bring into a situation Job roles, subject matter expertise, trades, strengths, skills.</p>	



## Considerations / impacts of your diversity

### What does good look like?

Each of those ICES aspects of you has rules, norms, attitudes, success metrics, behaviours, values, positive and negative associations, triggers and traditions. Some of these rules and norms are explicit and some are implicit or unsaid.

What are the accepted norms? What does good look like? What's discouraged?  
How does this impact my expectations of others?

### What's intuitive and natural?

According to psychologist Daniel Kahneman, we have two systems operating in our brains:

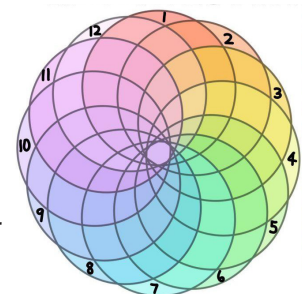
System 1	System 2
<p><b>Thinking Fast</b> <i>intuitive, fast, effortless, automatic, emotional, unconscious</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>helps us make snap decisions.</li> <li>often based on instinct or 'gut feel.'</li> <li>human nature, time and repetition builds most of our System 1</li> </ul>	<p><b>Thinking Slow</b> <i>slower, effortful, logical, analytical, deliberative</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it takes more effort and energy</li> <li>activated when we do something that does not come naturally and requires some sort of conscious mental exertion.</li> <li>lags behind System 1</li> </ul>

What's in your System 1 that might not be in other people's System 1?  
How does your unique diversity shape your System 1 associations and biases?

### We're made up of many layers and lenses

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term **intersectionality** to describe how different forms of oppression (and privilege) compound and reinforce each other.

Our intersectionality is how all of our different identities connect to shape our individual perspectives and experiences. Your intersectionality also shapes other people's perceptions of you.



graphic by: @SylviaDuckworth

What layers of your ICES are most influential or important to your identity?  
Which layers do other people notice about you first? What do they focus on?

### Privilege

Ohhh - this can be a touchy topic and can really upset people. Here's *one* consideration of privilege for work: you have a privilege when you don't have to actively put your System 2 thought into something. Especially at work.

*Ever get sick and really blocked up? You vow you'll never take breathing normally for granted again. And within a week of being better you don't think about your breathing. You just do it. That's kinda like privilege.*

What do you not have to think about at work?  
What are things you have to consider / think about that others might not?



## A brainy cheat sheet

### Our brain...

is a survival organ. It adapts over time and has evolved to give us the best survival chances.	can unconsciously process 11 million pieces of information per second!	can consciously process 40 pieces of information per second!	wants to conserve as much energy as possible. <i>Over 80% of the time it operates using automatic, fast thinking.</i>
is trying to find patterns and attribute meaning to those patterns. <i>We're better at seeing patterns than we are at recording details.</i>	is constantly scanning for threats to our SCARF needs: <i>status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness radars.</i>	physically changes based on what we do and learn in life. <i>We can create neurons and learn new things throughout our whole lives. (Neuroplasticity)</i>	is consciously & unconsciously impacted by our background, experiences, associates, social norms and stereotypes, cultural context.
<b>Our brain uses shortcuts (biases) to solve 4 problems:</b>			
<b>There's too much information coming in.</b>	<b>We can't remember everything.</b>	<b>There's not enough time.</b>	<b>There's not enough meaning</b>
likes things that are similar and familiar. It perceives differences as threats.	creates instantaneous feelings or opinions for or against people, ideas and situations. <i>(Bias)</i>	uses two types of thinking: fast and intuitive as well as slow and logical. <i>The logic always follows the emotion.</i>	develops at different rates in different people, depending on what you do and learn in life.
was built for walking. To improve your thinking skills, move!	is individual. No two people's brains store the same information in the same way in the same place.	needs sleep. Sleep loss means mind loss! Every metric of thinking goes down when we don't get enough sleep.	functions worse when stressed. Chronically stressed brains don't learn or react in the same way.
can perceive the same situation vastly differently than someone else because perception relies on our past experiences.	can recognise and imitate behaviour because of 'mirror neurons'.	learns by actively testing through observation, hypothesis, experimentation and conclusions.	doesn't pay attention to boring things. Different, funny or odd things stick out more than the ordinary.



# Biases are shortcuts to solve four problems

Remember those three survival functions of our brains (pg 1)? *Conserving energy, pattern seeking and meaning making.*

These three functions + the fact that our brains don't like problems + the fact that we are constantly faced with four problems = all of our biases. So what are the four problems?

**There's too much information coming in**, so we filter and recognise certain things but not others.

**There's too much to remember**, so we try to remember important things.

**There's not enough time**, so we act using the information we have.

**There's not enough meaning**, so we fill in the gaps.

## Problem: Too much information

### Our brain's solutions:

- We notice things already primed in memory or repeated often.
- Bizarre, funny, visually-striking, or anthropomorphic things stick out more than ordinary/unfunny things.
- We notice when something has changed.
- We're drawn to details that confirm our own existing beliefs.
- We notice flaws in others more easily than we notice flaws in ourselves.

## Problem: We can't remember everything

### Our brain's solutions:

- We store memories differently based on how they are experienced.
- We reduce events and lists to their key elements.
- We discard specifics to form generalities.
- We edit and reinforce some memories after the fact.

## Problem: There's not enough time

### Our brain's solutions:

- We favour simple-looking options and complete information over complex, ambiguous options.
- To avoid mistakes, we aim to preserve autonomy and group status and avoid irreversible decisions.
- To get things done, we tend to complete things we've invested time & energy in.
- To stay focused, we favour the immediate, relatable thing in front of us.
- To act, we must be confident we can make an impact and feel what we do is important.

## Problem: Not enough meaning

### Our brain's solutions:

- We tend to find stories when looking at sparse data.
- We fill in characteristics from stereotypes, generalities, and prior histories.
- We imagine things and people we're familiar with or fond of as better.
- We simplify probabilities and numbers to make them easier to think about.
- We think we know what other people are thinking.
- We project our current mindset and assumptions onto the past and future.



## Some biases that affect you at work

### **Anchoring bias**

We rely too much on the first piece of information we receive

### **Availability heuristic**

We judge how common something is based on how easily we can recall it

### **Google effect** (digital amnesia)

Our tendency to forget information that can be easily found online

### **Implicit bias / stereotypes**

Our tendency to over-generalise about a particular group of people. We assign a fixed set of attributes that we believe to be typical of this group

### **Confirmation bias**

The tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms one's pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses

### **Humour effect**

Humorous things are more easily and accurately remembered than non-humorous ones

### **Negativity bias**

Our tendency not only to register negative stimuli more readily but also to dwell on these events

### **Recency effect**

We give more weight to recent events over past data

### **Dunning - Kruger effect**

People with limited competence in a particular domain overestimate their abilities and those with high competence underestimate their abilities

### **IKEA effect**

This bias means we place a disproportionately high value on products and work that we have invested in or partially created ourselves

### **Affinity bias**

We favour members of our in-groups over out-groups. We feel warmth toward people because they're like us. We can relate to them and feel comfortable with them—what you are, is what you like

### **Attribution error**

We explain our own actions differently than others'—our mistakes are situational, others' are personal flaws

### **Sunk cost fallacy**

We're reluctant to change course of action because we've invested heavily in it, even when it's clear that abandonment would be more beneficial

### **Status Quo bias**

We prefer things to stay the same, even if change is beneficial

### **Authority bias**

Our tendency to attribute greater accuracy to the opinion of an authority figure and may be more influenced

### **Halo (Horn) effect**

We let one positive (or negative) trait influence our overall perception of someone

# Strategies to check our biases

## Start with yourself:

- **Grow your self-awareness** - talk about what makes you, you. Understand how that shows up in the workplace. Get feedback from others.
- **Embrace the learning journey** - continue to explore different biases (*there are 180+!!!!*), how our brains work, what barriers different people might face at work and how you can bring the best out of people.
- **Be vulnerable and open** - be vulnerable enough to ask questions and open-minded enough to listen to different answers.
- **Seek out new perspectives** - and challenge yourself not to dismiss them immediately.  
*Note: lean into the uncomfortability of it. It will instinctively feel wrong. It might just be different - and our System 1 rarely likes different.*
- **Listen, really listen.** Listen generously, not defensively. Don't listen to just respond but to understand and empathise.



## Discuss with your team and peers

- **Shine a light on your status quo and the dominant culture.** Be explicit and highlight what your norms are - *how work gets done, who gets heard, the culture that's dominant.* Remember you'll all be a bit biased towards the status quo.
- **Use a decision-making framework.** Apply structure approaches to weigh options systematically.
- **Recognise and discuss sticking points.** Different lenses = different expectations. And this can cause tensions.  
Below are twelve examples of generational sticking points identified by Haydn Shaw. In reality, these sticking points show up in identities outside of age as well:

communication	decision-making	dress code
feedback	fun at work	knowledge transfer
loyalty	meetings	policies
respect	training	work ethic

*Shaw, Haydn. Sticking points: how to get 4 generations working together in the 12 places they come apart.*

- **Flex what you can.** Be transparent about what can, and cannot, be flexed. Business necessities cannot be flexed -- everything else can. A business necessity: *anything involving health & safety or things that could risk losing your customers, your money making, or your funding.*

<b>Acknowledge</b> differences	<b>Appreciate</b> the why	<b>Flex</b> to accommodate	<b>Leverage</b> diverse strengths	<b>Resolve</b> the way forward
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## Six techniques from healthcare

Two US health researchers, Devine and Burgess, suggest six strategies to help overcome our unconscious bias:

<b>Stereotype replacement</b>	Recognise that how you respond is based on a stereotype and consciously adjust that response.
<b>Counter-stereotypical imaging</b>	Imagine the person as the opposite of the stereotype.
<b>Individualisation</b>	See the person as an individual rather than a stereotype ( <i>e.g. learn the person's personal history</i> ).
<b>Perspective taking</b>	Put yourself in the other person's shoes. <i>Learn their stories, experiences, pain points, etc.</i>
<b>Increase opportunities to connect with people who are different from you</b>	Expand your network of friends and colleagues.
<b>Partnership building</b>	Reframe interactions with the others as one between collaborating equals.

What's one thing you can do to grow your self-awareness today?

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## Thanks for coming!

From The Training Practice team - **Kristen, Hilary, Rachel and James**

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[RSVP to our May Tea and Toast: Feeling uncertain?  
How to work through it](#)

Hosted by Hilary Bryan, Friday 30 May, 8:30am at Ernst & Young

