Reflective Training on Biases, Stereotypes and Racism

Regional Project MHPSS in the Middle East

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Day 1

Morning Session 1 – Pre Break

Getting to Know Each Other

Philip or Mustafa?

I bake awesome banana cakes.

I like listen to Fayrouz in morning.

I worked as a support worker supporting people in their homes.

My father was born in Syria.

I like renaissance paintings.

I speak four languages.

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Ice Breaker

Write a thing or two about yourself (characteristics, hobbies, interests…) that you are comfortable sharing with the group and that is/are unconventional for your age/gender/status etc.

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Training Goals

Equip professionals working in humanitarian assistance and international cooperation to become (more) aware of (their) biases, stereotypes and possible racism and the interplay of those in the support they are providing to people. The ultimate aim is the provision of a more psychosocially informed, trauma-, context- and gender-sensitive support and the minimization of unintended harm.

Goal of Day 1:

Understand psychological safety and its importance in international cooperation

Understand subjective and selective perception and give context to them

Understand what stereotypes are and where they come from

Understand biases and their link to stereotypes

Reflect on biases and stereotypes in the context of one's work

Understand discrimination and privilege and how to become aware of them

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Expectations from Training

What are your expectation from the two days together?

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Riddle

A father and his son are involved in a car crash, and the father dies at the scene. The boy is rushed to the hospital, but the surgeon says, 'I can't operate on this boy; he's my son.

How can this be?

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Creating a Safe Space – Psychological Safety

The belief that there won't be negative consequences for speaking up with ideas, questions or concerns.

Key Points:

- Individual strenghts, talents and abilities are valued
- People are able to voice their own opinion without being worried about negative consequences
- Ways are found for everyone to speak and contribute
- The environment is shaped by social empathy and trust
- Mistakes are seen as learning opportunities

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How to Foster Psychological Safety

كيفية تعزيز الأمان النفسي

Encourage open and respectful communication

تشجيع ثقافة التواصل المفتوح والمحترم

Be transparent and set clear expectations

أن تكون شفافًا وتضع توقعات واضحة

Look at mistakes as opportunities for learning

النظر إلى الأخطاء كفرص للتعلم للفريق

Take a supportive and consultative approach to leadership

اتباع نهج داعم واستشاري في القيادة

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Let's come up with our safety agreements for our training together

لنقم بوضع اتفاقيات الأمان الخاصة بتدريبنا معًا

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Pre-Training Reflection Questions

Awareness & Understanding

1. How do you define racism? What forms can it take (individual, systemic, structural)?

2. What comes to mind when you hear the term "white privilege" or "structural racism"?

3. How comfortable do you feel discussing race and racism, especially in professional settings?

4. What do you currently understand about how racism operates in your country or community?

5. In what ways do you think racism might show up in your workplace or field of work?

Attitudes & Positioning

1. What role do you believe individuals play in challenging racism?

2. Do you see yourself as an ally or advocate in anti-racism work? Why or why not?

3. What emotions or thoughts come up for you when discussing racism?

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Morning Session 2 – Post Break

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Yanni Laurel

What do you hear?

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The Dress

What color is this dress?

Credit: Cecilia Bleasdale

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Subjective Perception

– Most people think of seeing and hearing as occurring in the eyes and the ears, but hearing and listening actually occur in the brain

– Hearing is simply perceiving sound, you can hear while you're asleep, and so in that regard, hearing is passive.

– Seeing and listening is **attributing meaning to visual information and to sound.**

– A host of factors, such as working memory, expectations, language skills, cognitive ability, hearing, musical skills and training, attention and more, influence the many ways people listen to the same audio clip.

– Your brain fills in any missing pieces with **what you expect to see and hear.**

→ There is no objective reality

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53RV35 7O PR0V3
H0W 0UR M1ND5 C4N
D0 4M4Z1NG 7H1NG5!
1MPR3551V3 7H1NG5!
1N 7H3 B3G1NN1NG
17 WA5 H4RD BU7
N0W, 0N 7H15 LIN3
Y0UR M1ND 1S
R34D1NG 17
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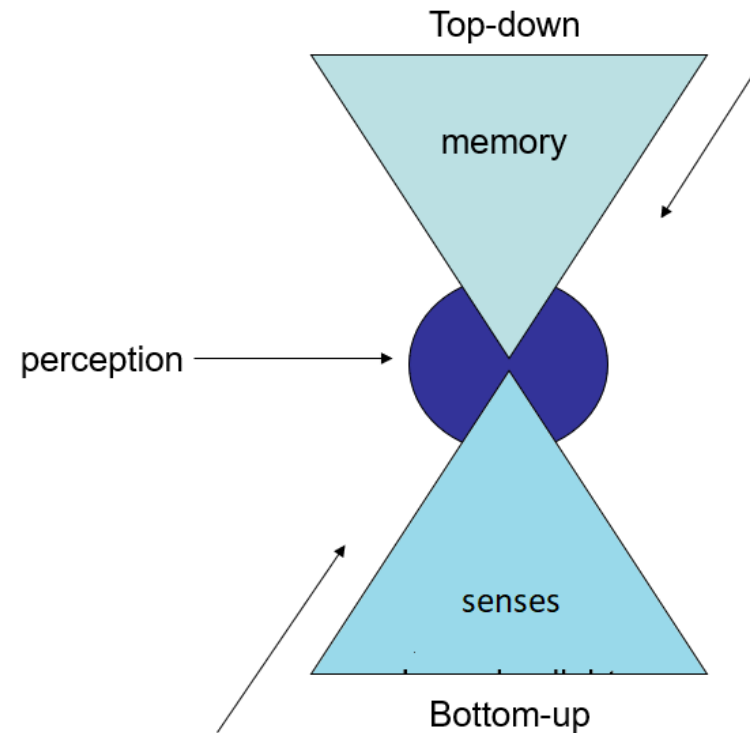C3R741N P30PL3 C4N
R3AD 7H15.

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What do You Hear?

Notice the sounds around you.

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Selective perception

- **https://youtu.be/vJG698U2Mvo**

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Perception

Credit: Chegg.com (Adapted)

Selective perception

- We select specific stimuli from our environment to create meaningful experiences while blocking out stimuli that are less important for us, that we think are not elevant at a certain point in time or that we perceive to contradict our beliefs and expectations.
- In other words: We focus on certain aspects in our environment while excluding others.

There are good reasons for this:
- we reduce complexity in a world that is already very complex
- we save energy we need for thought processes
- we organize our environment

But there are situations in which we actually want to look at diversity and complexity instead of simplifying things, such as when providing support to people.

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Social Perceptions – Group Work

- What's the name of the person in the picture?

- What does the person do in his*her everyday life?

- What does the person in the photo like? (Music, sports, food etc.)

- What is he*she doing in her spare time?

- What other qualities, interests, could the person have? (For example, if he*she is single or married, is he*she religious or does religion not matter to her, if he*she has a job or is unemployed, does he*she speak several Languages, what plans does he*she have for the future ...?)

Credit: Damir Khabirov

Credit: Liubomyr Vorona

Credit:PIKSEL

Credit: poco_bw

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Stereotypes

Stereotype = simplifying, generalizing, schematic, cognitive reduction of an experience, opinion or idea.

Functions:

- Reduction of complexity

- Sense of safety and predictability

Stereotypes are mostly part of our automatic thinking. There is also controlled thinking (conscious, voluntary, intentional, costly) → Allows control and correction of automatic processes.

The problem with stereotypes is not that they are false, but that they are incomplete…

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What is the next number?

3-6-9-?-?-?

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Confirmation bias

Confirmation Bias is the tendency to give more weight to information that confirms the things we already believe, and less to information that contradicts us.

It can explain:

Attitude polarisation: where a disagreement becomes increasingly more extreme even though the people involved share the same facts and evidence

Belief perseverance: where people continue to believe something even after the evidence for that belief is shown to be false

The irrational primacy effect: where people who are exposed to a series of information will give more weight to things they learnt earlier than to things they learnt later

Stereotype reinforcement: where people give more weight to experiences that support their existing prejudices than to experiences which contradict them

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Afternoon Session 1 – Pre Break

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Bias

Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.

What is the next number?

3-6-9-?-?-?

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Confirmation bias

Bottom-up vs top-down.

Confirmation Bias happens here

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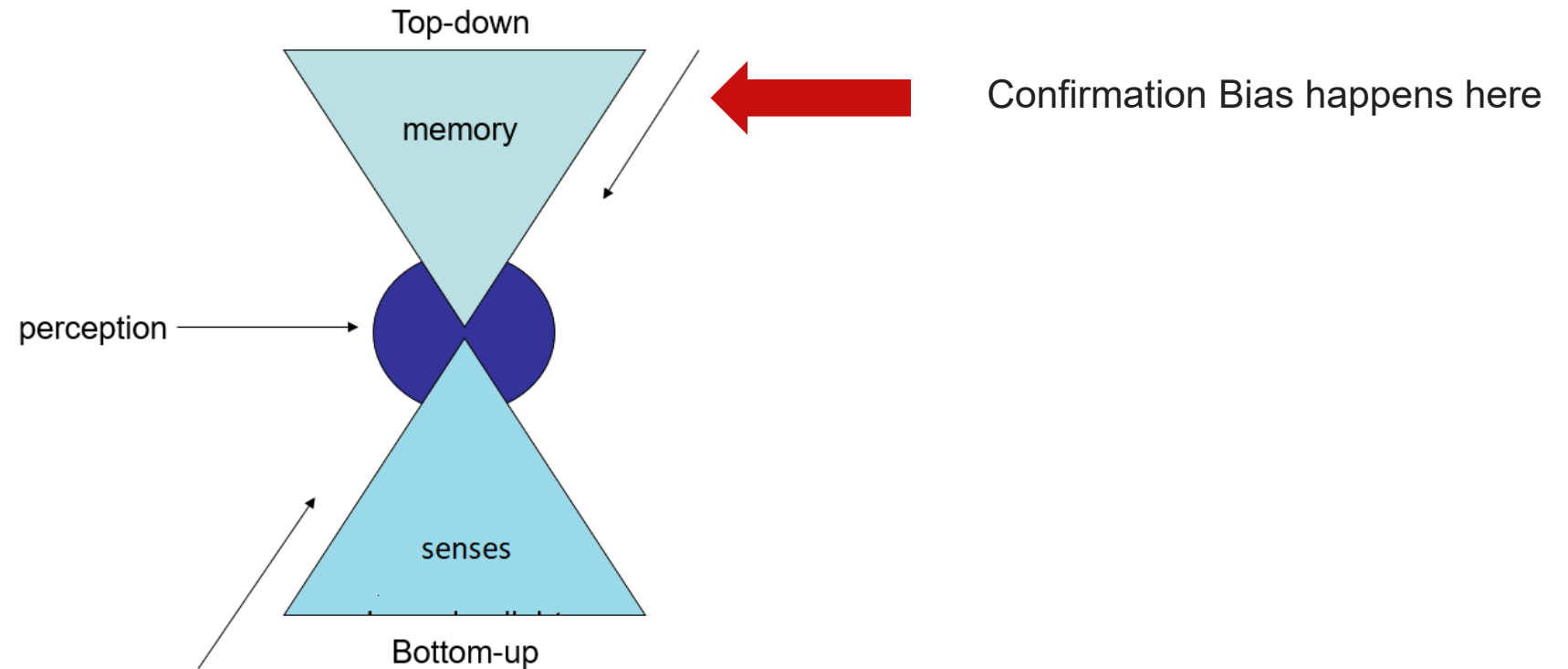
Biases Case

A 16-year-old Syrian girl joins a psychosocial support group in a refugee community. She barely speaks in the first few sessions.

What assumptions might the facilitators make?

Potential Biases

Overprotection: They may speak for her or avoid encouraging her to participate too much, thinking she is too fragile to engage.

Lowered Expectations: They might expect less contribution from her, not inviting her to leadership activities, expressive tasks, or more dynamic group exercises.

Overinterpretation of Silence: They may interpret her quietness only as a symptom of trauma, overlooking other possibilities like language barriers, cultural norms about speaking in public, distrust of new groups, or simply needing time to observe.

One-Directional Support: They might focus on offering her emotional reassurance without giving her meaningful agency to define her own needs or participate actively.

Labeling: Internally (even without saying it out loud), they may label her as "the traumatized one," which shapes how they interact with her and what they expect from her progress.

Less Inclusion: Assuming she's "not ready," they may unintentionally exclude her from decision-making or creative parts of the program, reinforcing her sense of invisibility.

Avoidance of Topics: They might avoid involving her in discussions around empowerment, community action, or advocacy, assuming these are too overwhelming for her.

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Reflecting on Our Own Work

Share a moment in your job where you realized you had made an assumption about someone — a colleague, a community member, or someone you were supporting. What helped you realize this? What did you do?

What helped you catch the assumption?

How was your behaviour towards this person influenced by your assumption?

How can you make space to challenge assumptions safely?

How can we reflect on assumptions before starting a new community-based activity?

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Afternoon Session 2 – Post Break

Privilege

https://www.youtu.be/hRiWgx4sHGg

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Privilege Exercise

Please assume you are the person described in the paper handed to you for this exercise.

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Privileges…

- give advantages, favors, benefits to members of dominant social identity groups at the expense of members of other groups.

- white people; able-bodied people; heterosexuals; males; middle or owning class people; English-speaking people.

- are mostly invisible to people who have them.

- are unearned and granted to people whether they want those privileges or not.
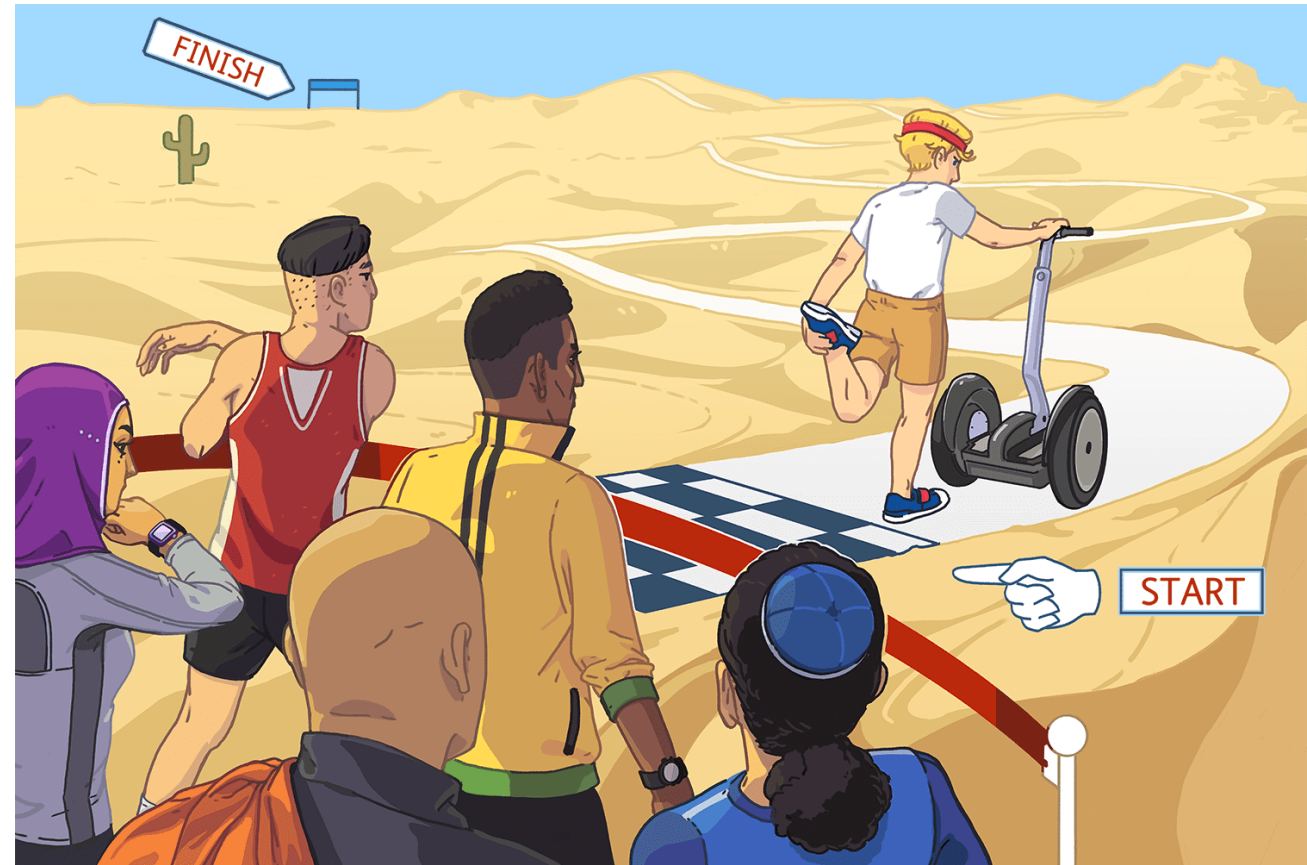
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Peer-Based Reflection

- A time I experienced discrimination.

- A time I witnessed discrimination and didn't act.

- A time I witnessed discrimination and acted.

- A time I realized I had discriminated against someone.

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Evaluation and Closing

What are your impression of today?

What did you like?

What did you not like?

What would you do differently?

What are your wishes for tomorrow?

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