25 YEARS | GCSP Geneva Centre for Security Policy

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Developing an Inclusive Mindset
The Power of Connection and Difference

GCSP Inclusive Security Policy Brief Series

Centuries of globalisation and cross-border flows of people, goods, information, and technology have built multiple layers of connection among us. They have transformed the way we live and shaped many of the security risks we face, ranging from viruses and cyber attacks to environmental disasters.

Tensions have emerged stemming from differences – e.g. different needs, values and identities – among communities and nations. Finding social, political, and economic solutions that integrate and include difference and diversity can be challenging. Firstly, the most vulnerable and marginalised are often the most affected by risks, and the least likely to hold power and influence decision-making. Secondly, we are hard wired to categorise, compare and identify ourselves in groups, and instincts drive us to protect ourselves from threats from 'others'.

However, embracing difference and seeing the value in diverse perspectives and experiences are not only essential to creating inclusion, but are critical to our ability to find pathways to a sustainable and peaceful future. Not only can we not 'turn back the clock' on centuries of connections, but there is a huge potential to leverage the connections, collective intelligence, and creativity that exist across nations and communities.

Building inclusive societies requires both institutional responses, and the 'hardware' to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised people have spaces to engage with and influence policies and decisions. It

also requires behavioural change – the 'software'[1]– which will be the focus of this policy brief.

"What a wonderful, liberating thing it would be if more of us, more of the time, could see diversity not as a burden, but as a blessing; not as a threat, but as an opportunity."

Prince Shāh Karim al-Husayni Aga Khan IV

<https://www.akdn.org/speech/his-highness-aga-khan/africa-2016-conference>

How do we think?

Most people believe that their thinking is based on rational analysis, combined with a smaller proportion of instinct. However, neuroscience research increasingly shows that we do not make 'rational' decisions, but emotional ones, with **just 2 per cent of cognition falling into the rational category (with the remainder based on emotion),**[2] and even then, only when the brain's executive function shifts from the default intuitive mode to the analytical thinking mode.[3] Nobel Prize Laureate Daniel Kahneman has developed the concept of 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' to explain two systems that drive the ways in which we think: the first system is fast, instinctive and emotional; the second is slower, more deliberative and more logical.[4]

We actually perceive and process information and reason through heuristics, mental models, and frames informed by our life experiences, upbringing, and cultural norms. As explained in the 'facts and stats' box below, this leads to biases in our thinking. When combined with social instincts to identify ourselves with groups, biases can manifest themselves in the unequal treatment of others. Most biases are implicit, developing from religion, family, friends, society, education, etc. without people realising where they come from. Not all biases are bad. They help us to process information quickly, but also make our decisions less objective.[6] Therefore, we need to differentiate between our positive and negative associations and recognise where we are on the spectrum that extends between these two types of associations.[7]

So, what do we need to watch out for? Basically this includes:

- **attitudes** that lead to implicit evaluative judgements;
- **stereotypes** that lead to cognitive associations with groups in society; and
- **prejudices** that reflect consciously motivated bias.[8]

[1] W. Kymlicka, "The Hardware and Software of Pluralism", Global Centre for Pluralism, March 2017, <https://www.pluralism.ca/press-release/hardware-software-pluralism/>.
[2] G. Lakoff, "Why It Matters how We Frame the Environment", Environmental Communication, Vol.4(1), 2010, pp.70-81.
[3] P. Croskerry, G. Singhal and S. Mamede, "Cognitive Debiasing 1: Origins of Bias and Theory of Debiasing", British Medical Journal, Vol.22(2), 2013.
[4] D. Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow, Toronto, Doubleday, 2011.
[5] M. Halilovic et al., Gender Bias and the Law: Legal Frameworks and Practice from Bosnia & Herzegovina and Beyond, DCAF, 2017, <https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/AI-DCAF-2017-Gender-Bias%26Law-legalframeworks%26practice%20from%20Bosnia%26Herzegovina-and-beyond.pdf>.
[6] T. Chu, "How Unconscious Bias Holds Us Back", The Guardian, 1 May 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/01/unconscious-bias-women-holding-back-work>.
[7] G. Origgi and A. Lipinsky, "Unravelling Implicit Biases: Research Evidence", 2020, <http://ec.europa.eu/research/pdf/workshop_igb/gloria_origgi_unravelling_implicit_biases_research_evidence.pdf>.
[8] Ibid.

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Group Think

'Group think' occurs when members of a group minimise internal conflict and reach a consensus decision without critical evaluation. Group members desire cohesiveness and there is a loss of individual creativity, uniqueness and independent thinking. The group often overrates its own ability and values in its decision-making processes. The collapse of the airline Swissair, once known as the 'flying bank' due to its perceived financial stability, is a frequently cited example of this. Some see the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq as a serious miscalculation resulting from unexamined group think within the administration.

<https://www.e-ir.info/2015/07/25/unknown-knowns-a-groupthink-model-on-the-u-s-decision-to-go-to-war-in-iraq/>

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."
Anaïs Nin, author

What can we do?

A number of tools, including critical thinking and the integration of different perspectives, enhance our ability to lead collaboratively and inclusively. These are some of our recommendations:

1) Deepen your self-awareness of your own values, attitudes and beliefs, and the life experiences that have contributed to your developing them.

2) Seek to challenge your assumptions before you form a judgement: Whose voices are you listening to? Which data are you looking at? Who and what are missing or under-represented? Are you making judgements based on past experiences or opening yourself up to all the possibilities of the present?

3) Be curious and embrace difference: Seek to understand other perspectives and the values underpinning them through immersive and cultural experiences, including stories and dialogue, and endeavour to work with people with different backgrounds and skills.

4) Identify triggers that lead you to adopt 'fight, flight or freeze' mode or to your feeling 'out of group', and work on mindfulness, presence and leadership embodiment, which allow you to respond rather than react to each situation.

5) In polarised situations characterised by tension, conflict or disagreement, seek to identify **shared larger purposes** and understand the **values and fears leading to differences.** Applying a 'polarity lens' is a key leadership tool that the Geneva Leadership Alliance uses. Explore it further in this opinion piece:

<https://www.gcsp.ch/global-insights/diversity-and-inclusion-applying-ancient-wisdom-shift-mindsets-more-sustainable>.

Within your team and organisation we encourage you **apply a gender lens** and **strive for diversity and inclusion,** while seeking to de-bias broader systems, not just people. This will be the focus of the next brief in this series.

FACTS AND STATS:

Kahneman identifies six heuristics that shape our thinking:[1]

'Anchoring': We are influenced by irrelevant numbers; for example, the value of a product will seem higher if the initial established price is high.

'Availability': We use mental shortcuts to make judgements based on how easy it is for us to think of examples. For example, individuals are more likely to purchase natural disaster insurance after the incident has occurred rather than prior to it.

'Substitution': We substitute a difficult question for a simpler heuristic one. For instance, the question "How far will this candidiate running for election go in politics?" becomes "Does this candidate look like a winner?"

'Optimism and loss aversion' affects the human behaviour of the illusion of control, which makes us neglect competitors and believe we can outperform the average.

'Framing': 90 per cent chance of survival or 1 in 10 chance of dying in an operation? Positive framing highlights gains whereas negative framing highlights risks.
'Sunk cost' is a false belief that an incremental investment will produce a positive outcome.

As many as 175 cognitive biases in thinking have been identified, ranging from overconfidence and confirmation bias to an empathy gap.[2]

Furthermore, biases become **embedded in our systems and structures,** and this is becoming more evident with technology; for example, 85 per cent of artificial intelligence (AI) systems have biased results due to bias in the algorithms, data or teams that built them. With regard to team bias, 78 per cent of AI experts are male.[3]

1 Kahneman, 2011.
2 B. Kasanoff, "175 Reasons You Don't Think Clearly", Forbes, March 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brucekasanoff/2017/03/29/sorry-you-cant-make-a-logical-data-driven-decision-without-intuition/#21edbd407f60>.
3 J. L. Teigland, "Why We Need to Solve the Issue of Gender Bias before AI Makes It Worse", April 2019, <https://www.ey.com/en_us/wef/why-we-need-to-solve-the-issue-of-gender-bias-before-ai-makes-it>.

THIRD IN A SERIES...

Written by Fleur Heyworth Head of Gender and Inclusive Security, GCSP in collaboration with GCSP staff and Fellows, this is the third in a series of inclusive security policy briefs. The first was on inclusive security, the second on human empowerment. We unpack some key concepts and provide concrete actions we can all take to integrate inclusive behaviours and practices into our lives and work, overcome biases and narrow perspectives, and harness the collective intelligence of diverse voices. We aim to highlight the positive potential of behavioural change and technology to gather disaggregated data and identify patterns and opportunities to generate more responsive policies and programmes, systems and structures.