

Unconscious bias in people management

What is this training about?

Unconscious

- Not consciously realized, planned, or done

Bias

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

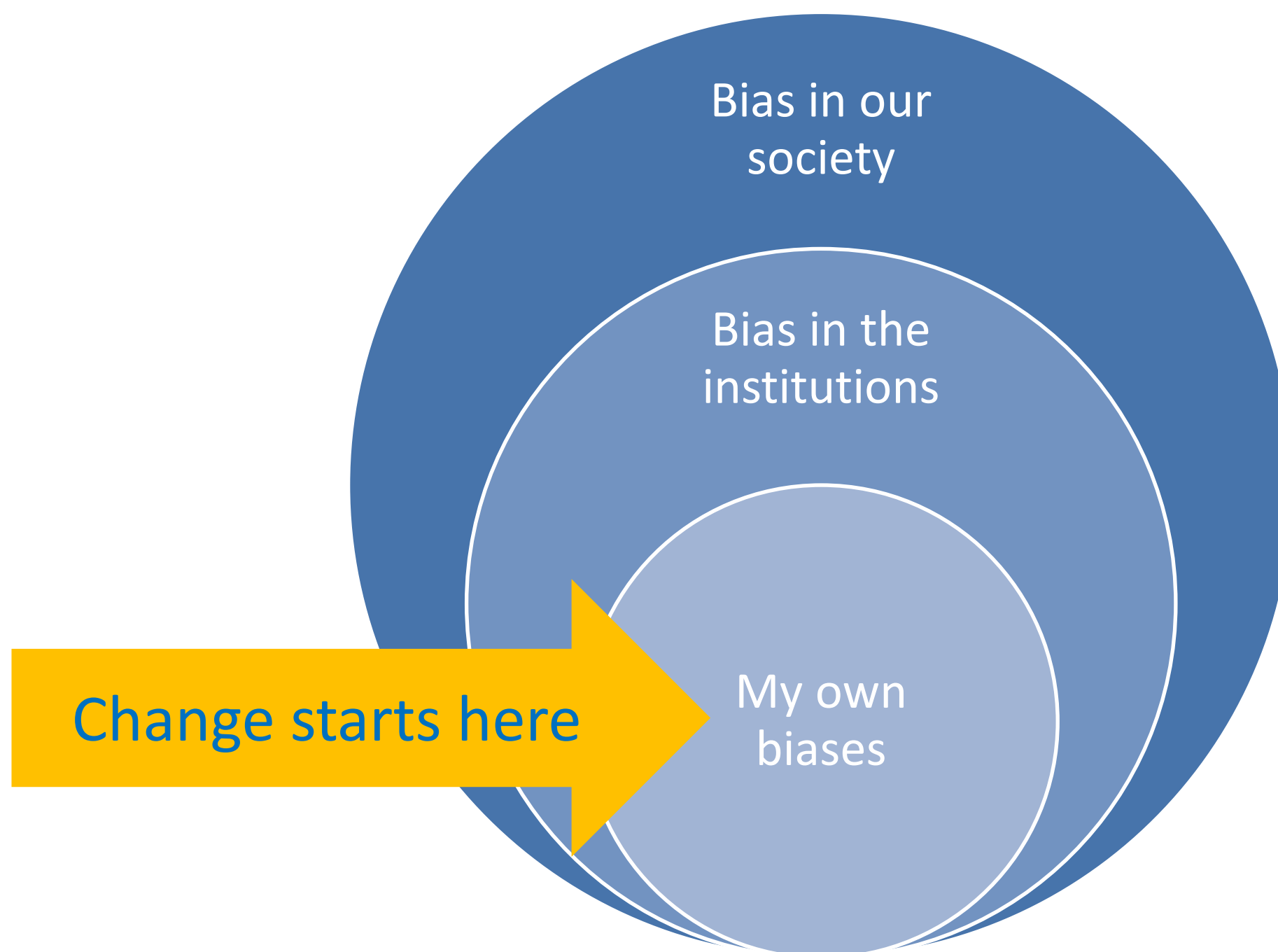
In People Management

- Recruitment, selection of assignments, evaluations and promotions, trust and connection with each team member

We will see how bias is part of how our brain works

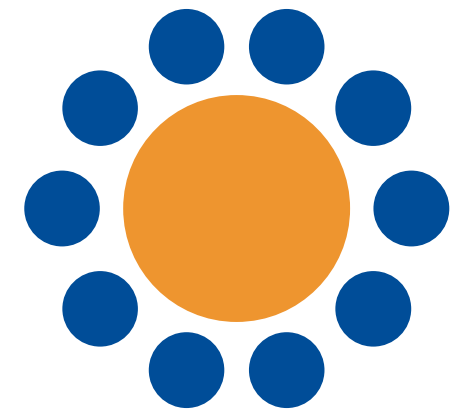
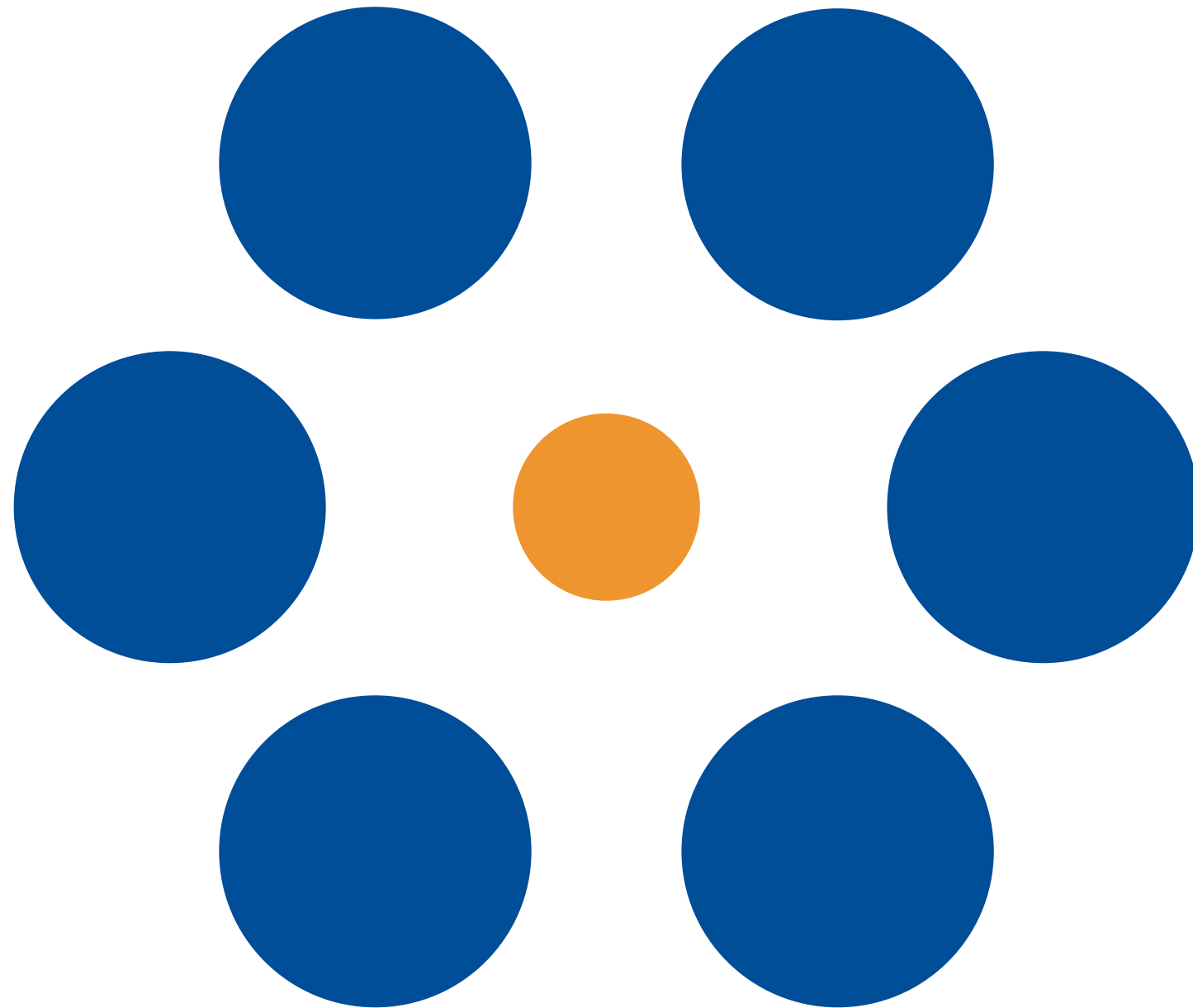


We will have a close look at ourselves





The first and most important step is to create awareness



We will focus on how we feel about others and how that impacts our judgement

Empathy



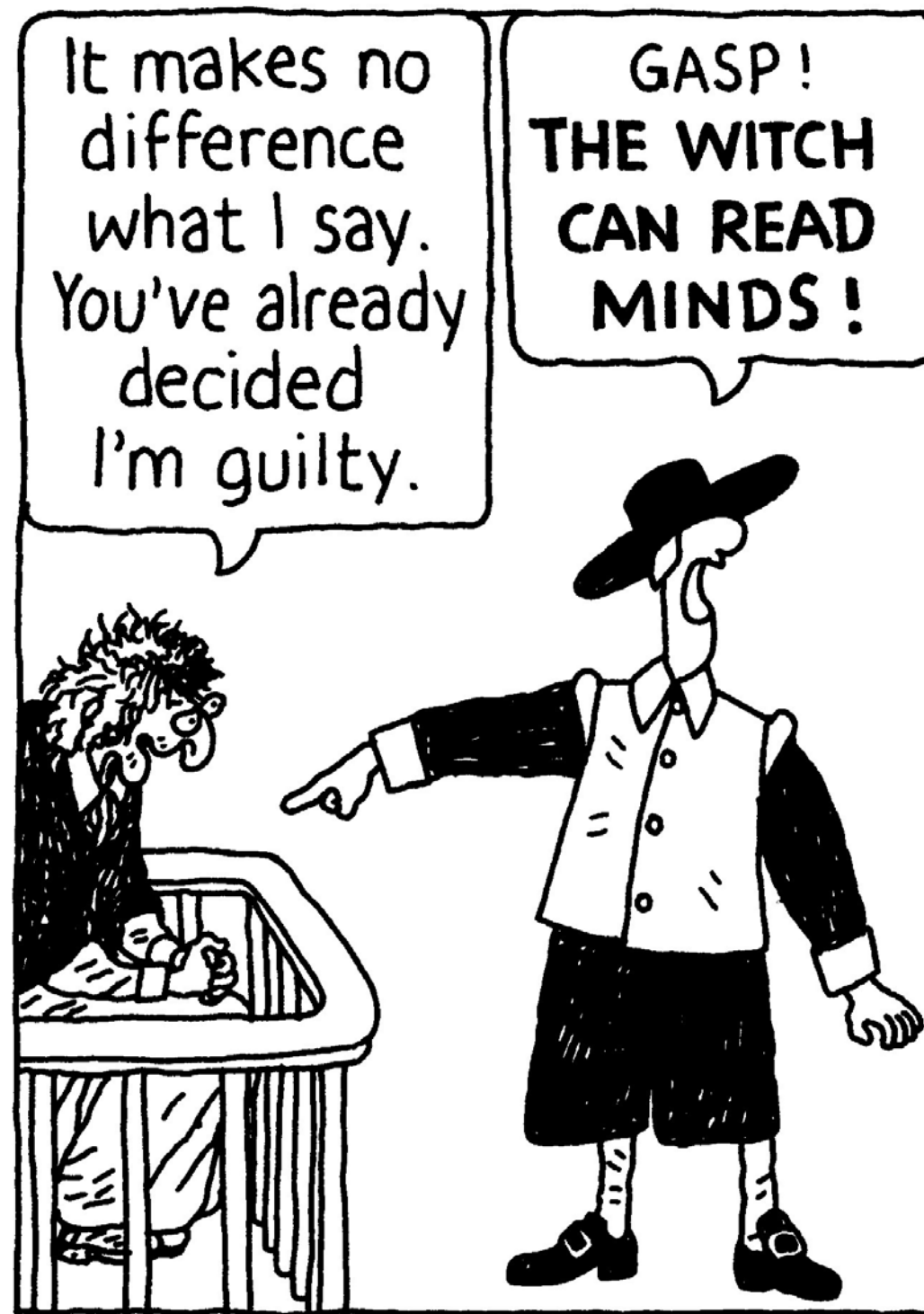
Who do we have more empathy
for? Who do we have less?

Judgement



How fair are we in our
judgement and retributions?
Who are we giving too much
credit to? Who not enough?

Finally, we will reflect on practical steps we can take to mitigate bias



CartoonStock.com

In practice



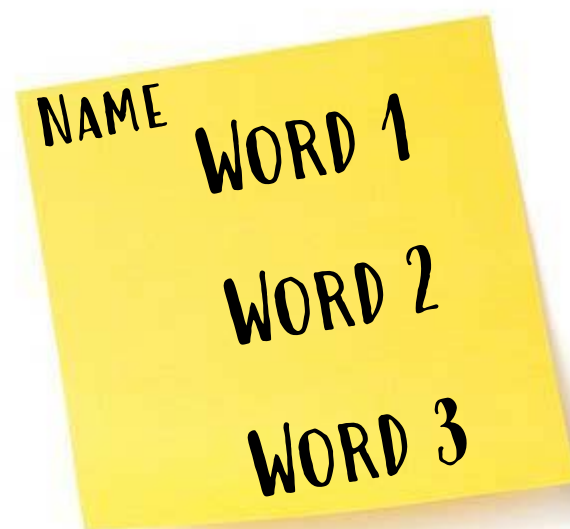
- Introduction
- Part 1 – Your brain
- Part 2 – Self-awareness
- Increase your self-awareness in your day-to-day work
- Part 3 – prevention and mitigation
 - Recruitment
 - Selection of assignments
 - Evaluations and promotions
 - Connection and trust

Prevention and mitigation work
better with self-awareness

Introduce yourself

Imagine you have a job application process and the only CV you can send consists of 3 words – which words do you chose?

What motivated you to join this course?



Note: don't use words that describe your job, use words that describe you

What's your commitment to make today a success?

What do you want
to add?

Participate
Don't judge
Take ownership

Listen

Have fun Be respectful

Show empathy

Keep an open mind

Everyone needs to feels safe to share!

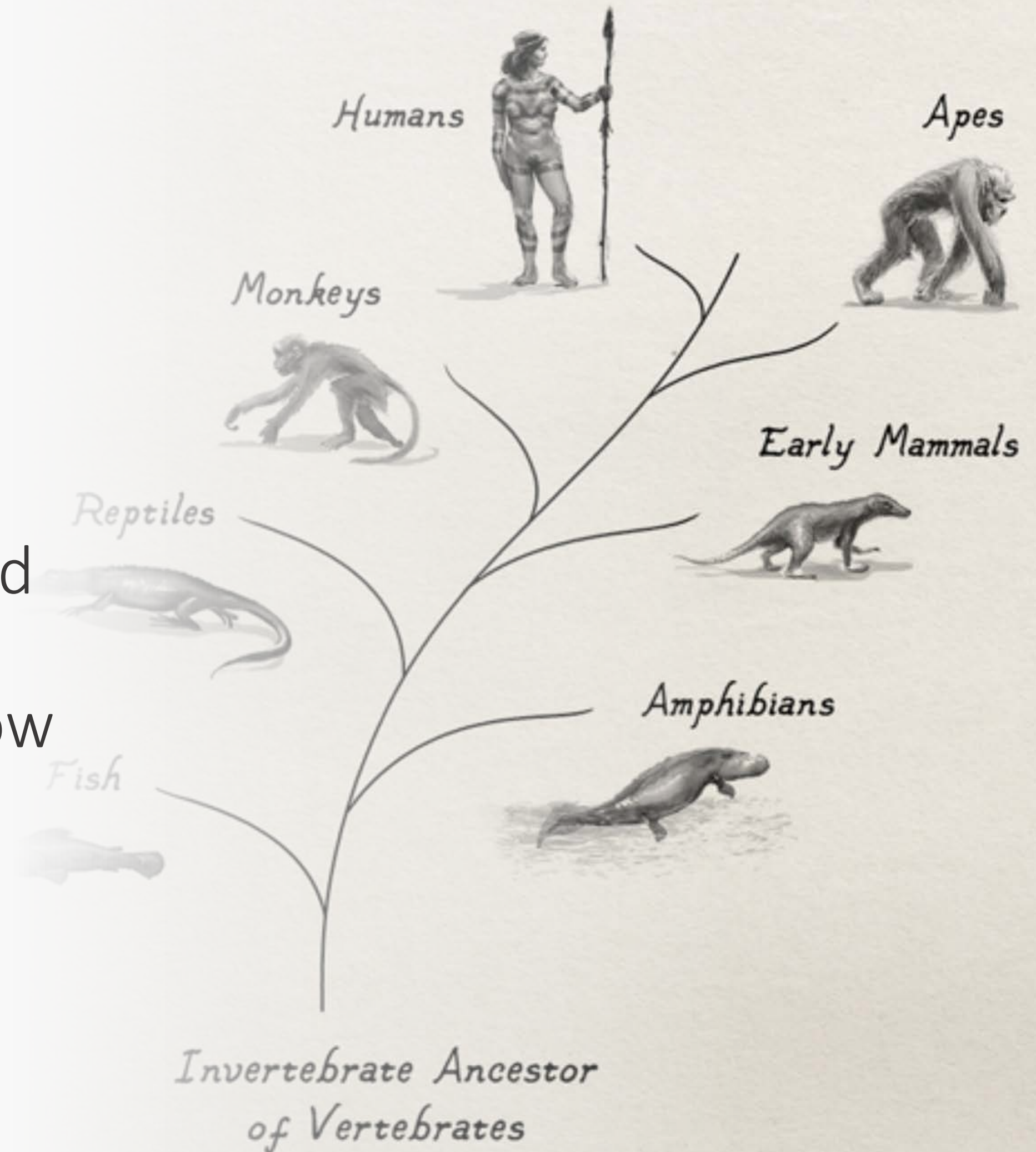


Did you or
someone you know
experience bias?

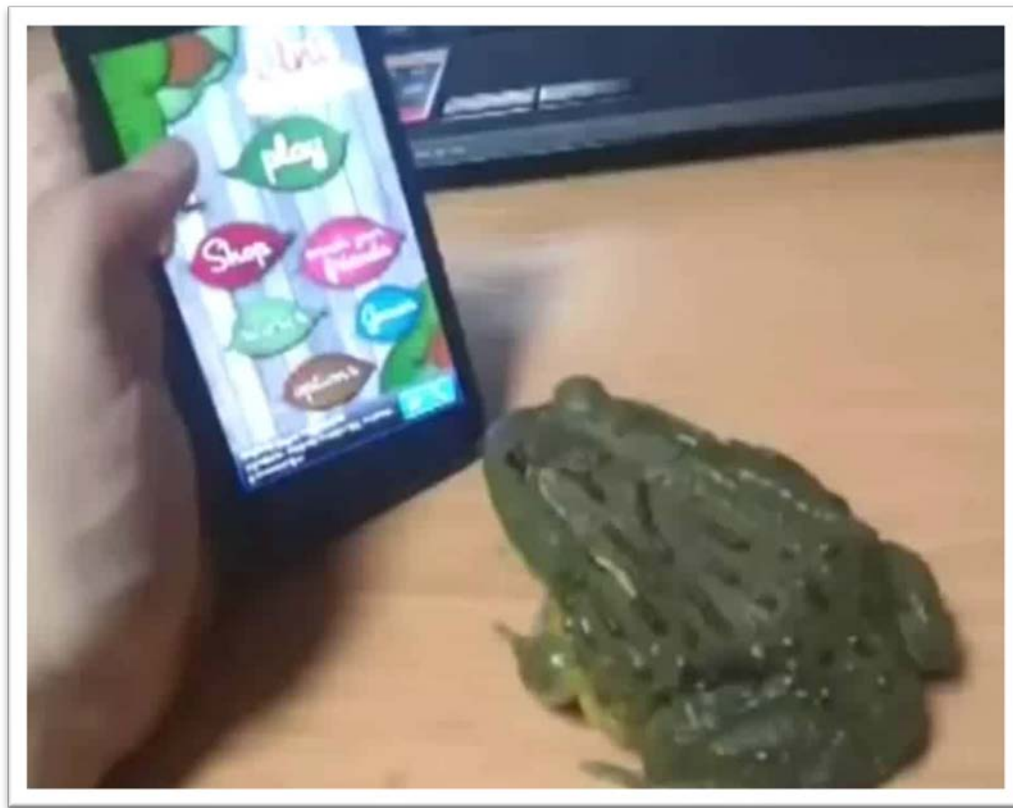
Part 1 – Your Brain

Humans are the result of a long process of evolution.

We've developed logic but largely overestimate how much we use it



Other species find food, mates and survive without our rational reasoning brains



If...then fixed rules

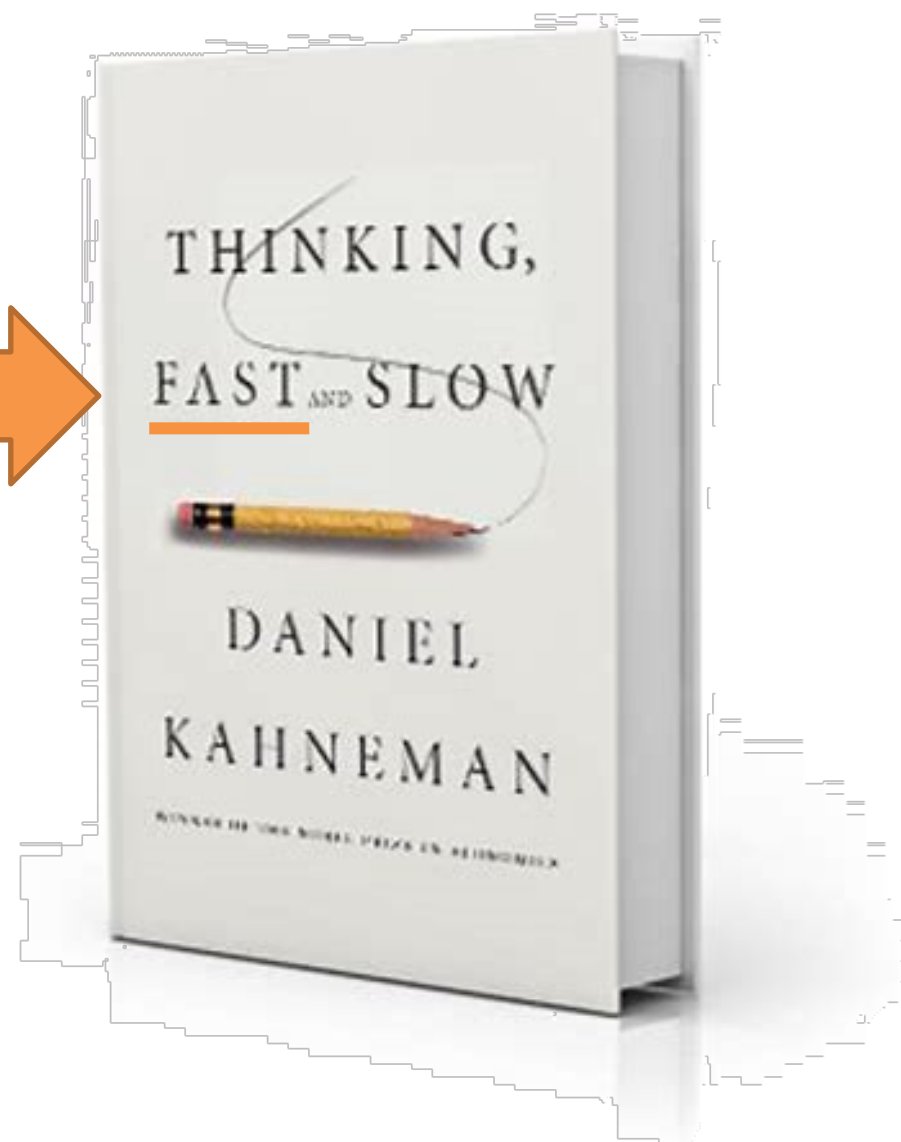


**If...then + conditioned
association learning**

Our brains also use these strategies

These strategies are automatic, fast and effortless

System 1



$2+2=?$



Don't read this:
you just did!



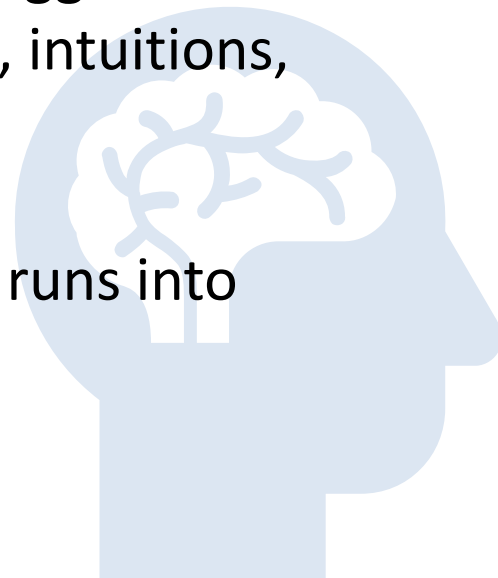
How did I get home? I
was supposed to
drive to the
supermarket...

Automatic doesn't mean basic

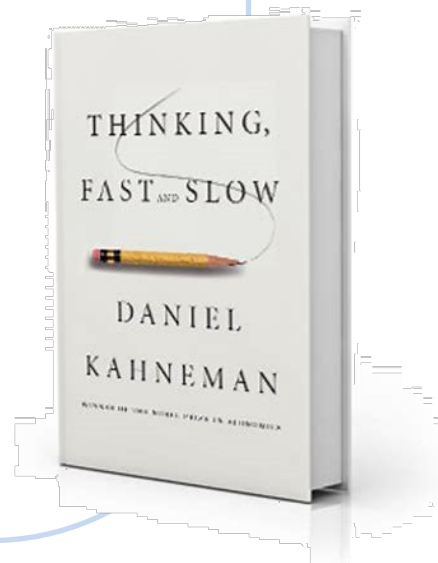
System 1 is responsible for the majority of what we think & do

System 1

- **Fast** thinking, **automatic**, effortless
- Continuously generates suggestions for system 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions and feelings
- Calls on system 2 when it runs into difficulty
- **Mostly unconscious**
- Very fast and efficient because it uses approximations and **biases**
- You can't turn it off!



System 2



Researches have identified hundreds of biases

THE COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX

What Should We Remember?

We favor 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 and energy in

To stay focused, we favor the immediate, relatable thing in front of us

Need To Act Fast

To act, we must be confident we can make an impact and feel what we do is important

We project our current mindset and assumptions onto the past and future

We notice things already primed in memory or repeated often

Bizarre, funny, visually striking, or anthropomorphic things stick out more than non-bizarre/unfunny things

Too Much Information

We notice when something has changed

We are drawn to details that confirm our own existing beliefs

We notice flaws in others more easily than we notice flaws in ourselves

We tend to find stories and patterns even when looking at sparse data

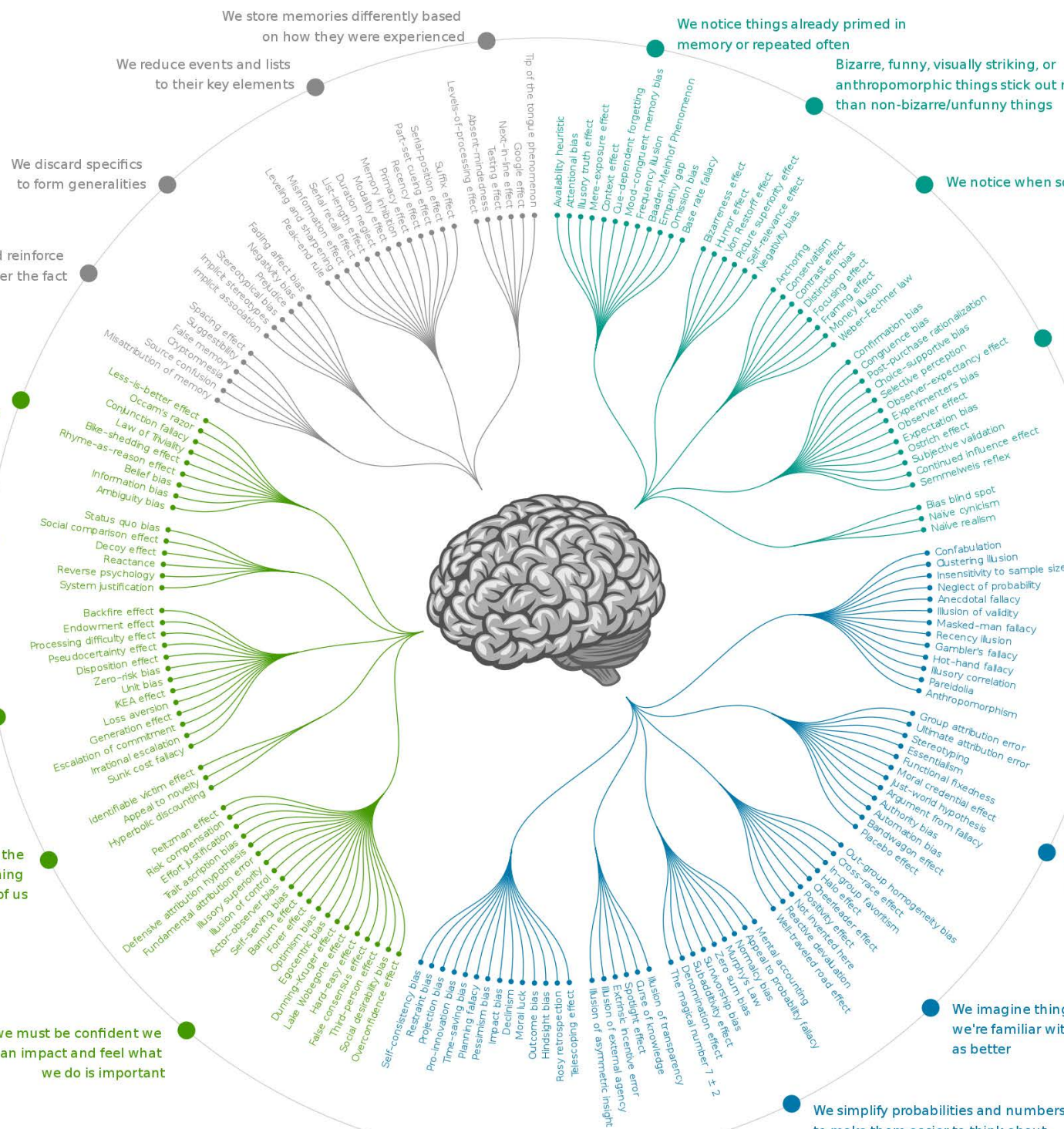
We fill in characteristics from stereotypes, generalities, and prior histories

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

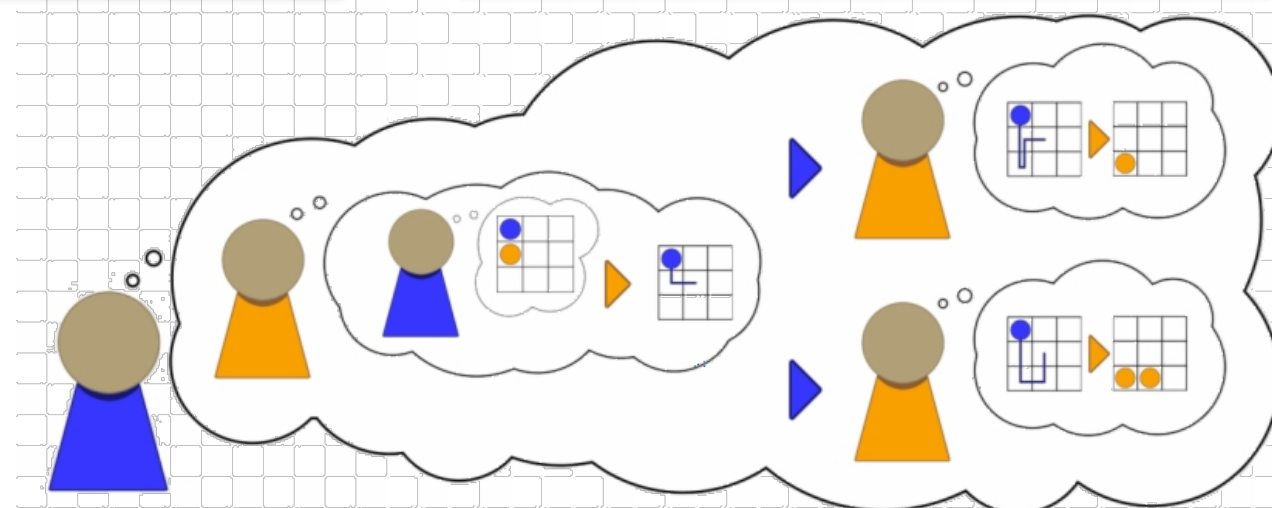
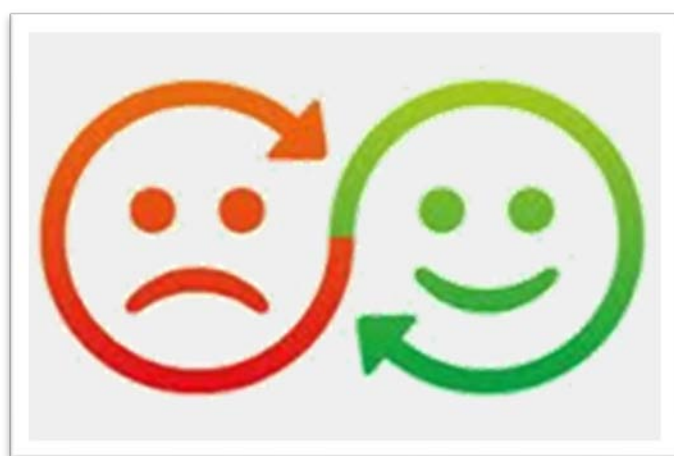
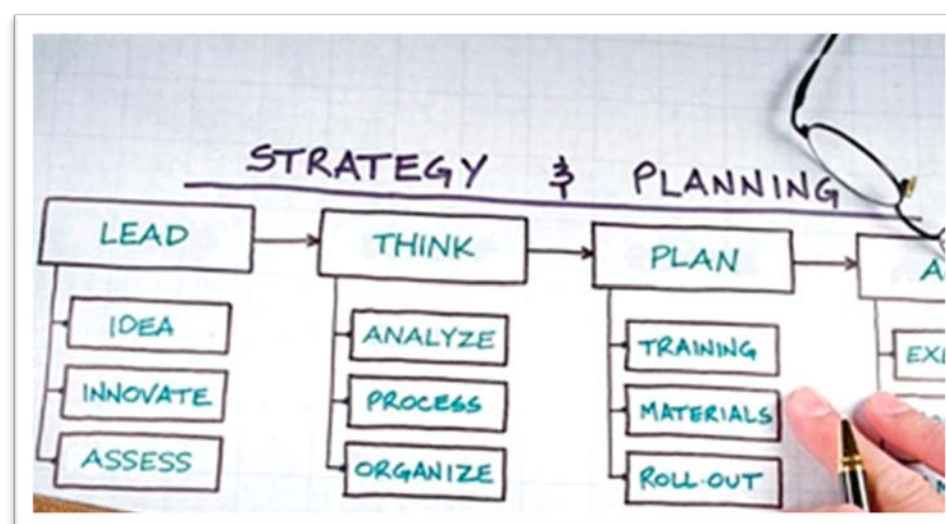
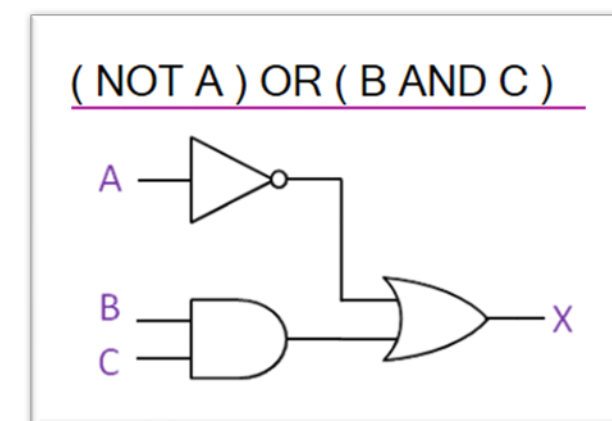
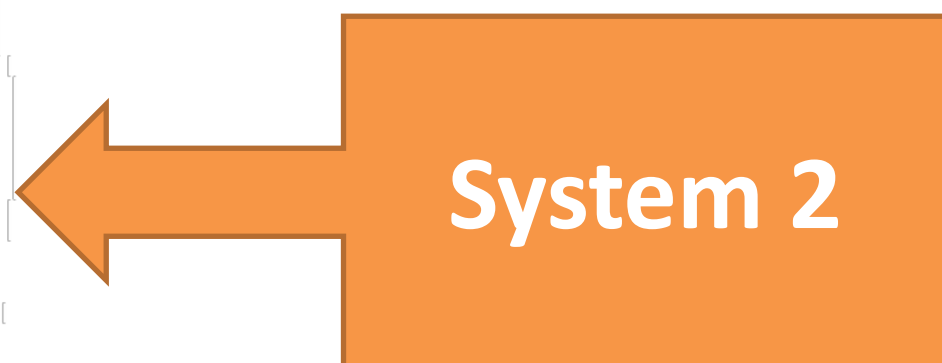
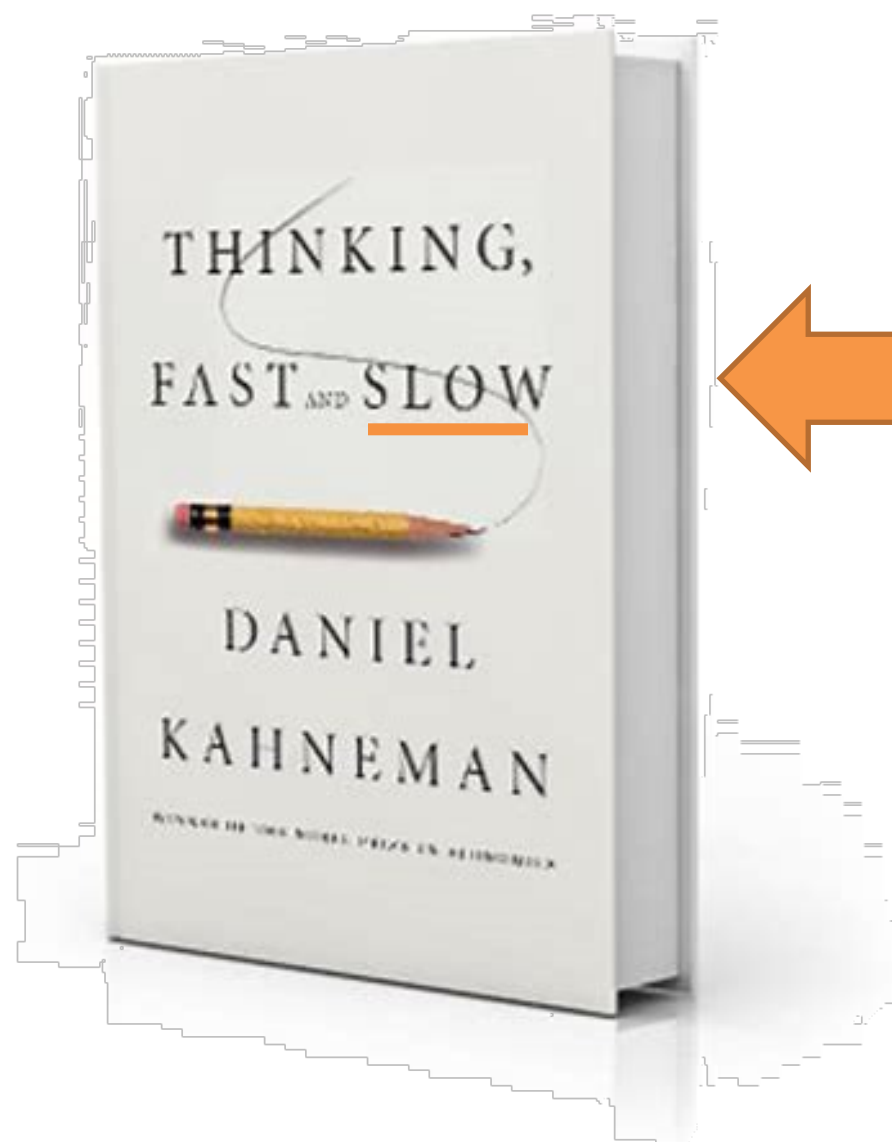
Not Enough Meaning

We think we know what other people are thinking



System 2 is slower and mostly very effortful

312*47=?



For logic (system 2) to win over a belief (system 1), S2 needs to inhibit the activity coming from S1

Congruent logic and belief

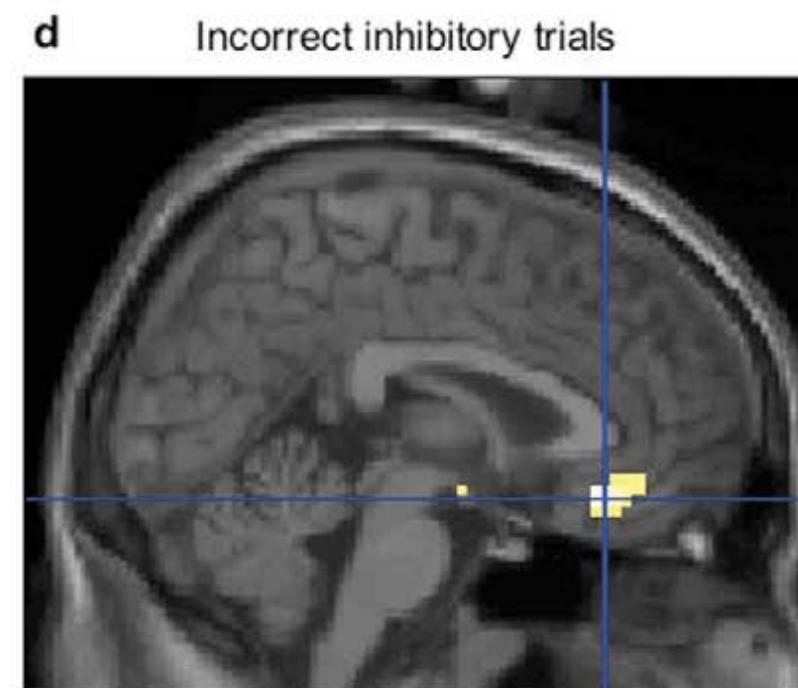
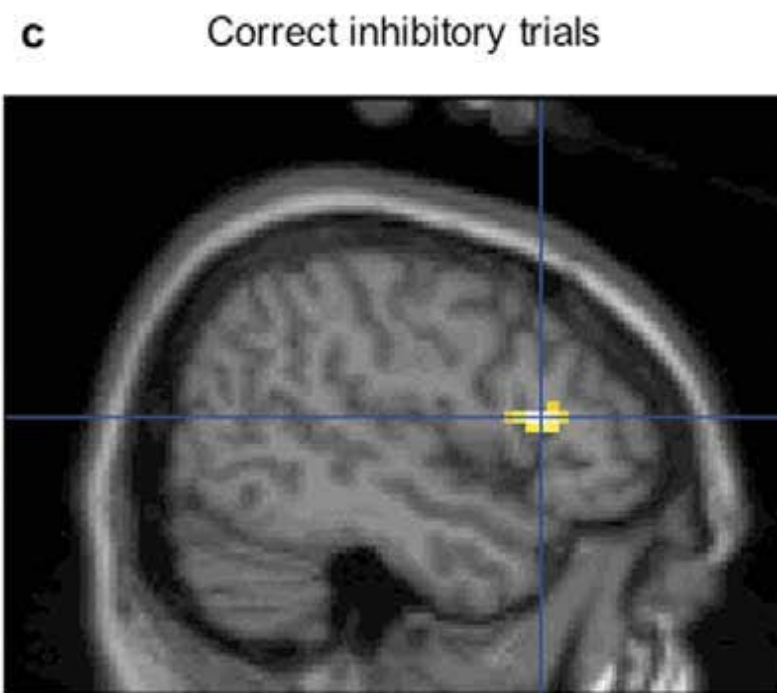
- No cigarettes are inexpensive.
- Some addictive things are inexpensive.
- Some addictive things are not cigarettes.

Incongruent logic and belief

- No addictive things are inexpensive.
- Some cigarettes are inexpensive.
- Some cigarettes are not addictive.

Correct trials = strong inhibition
right lateral prefrontal cortex

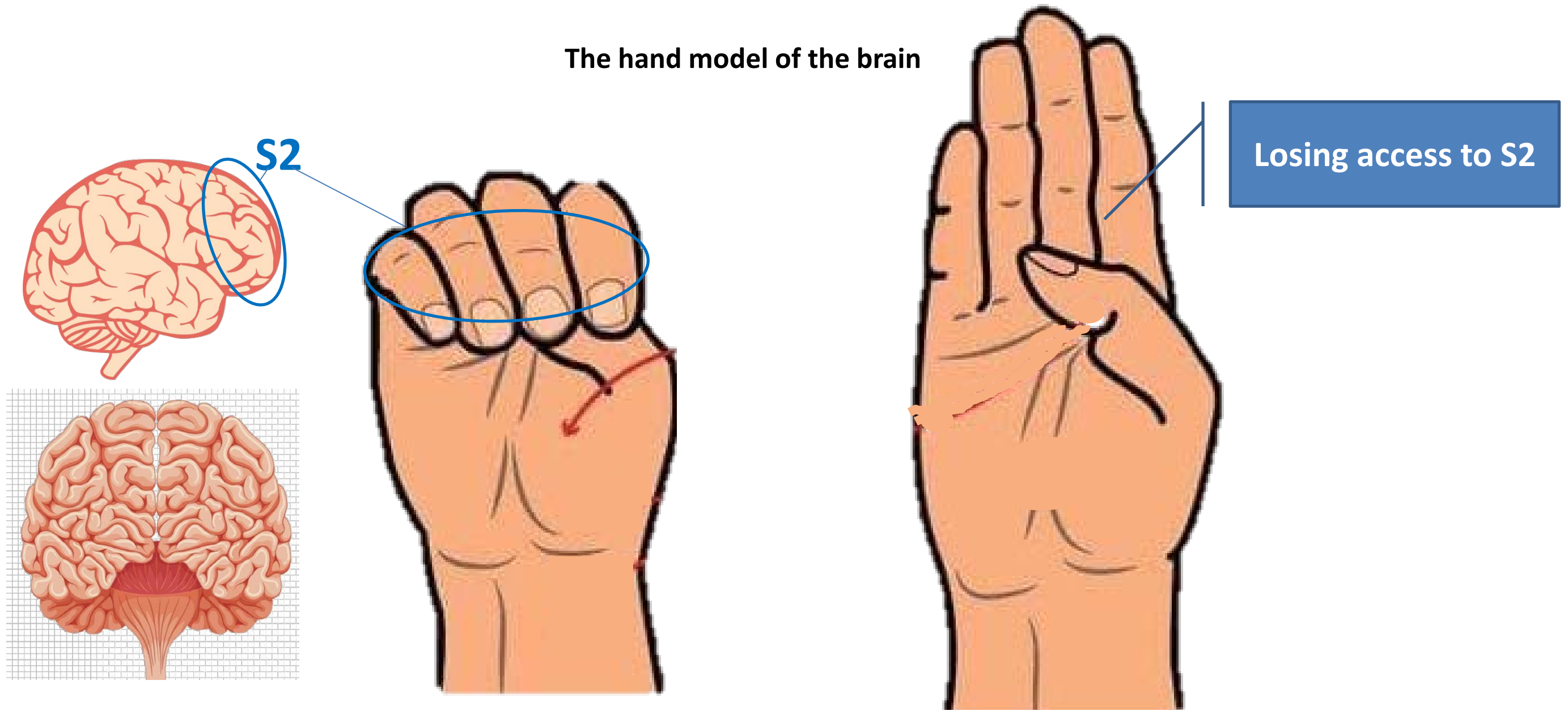
Incorrect trials = strong
system 1 activity (VLPC)



Not everyone is the same – some people have stronger S1 activity, some have stronger “breaks” inhibiting S1

But when emotions run high or when our S2 is fatigued, we lose access to our S2 abilities

The hand model of the brain



This is not just an image:
Resources available for overall executive functions in the prefrontal cortex decrease

The result...

Bias



But also

Today



Rather
than

In the future



Rather
than



Empathy

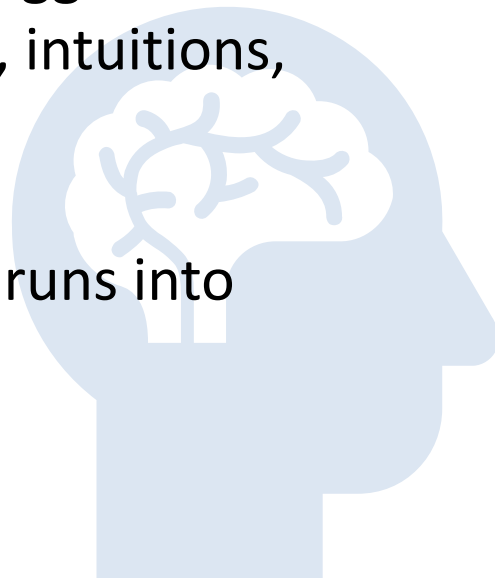
Honesty



Summary - Two ways we think and decide

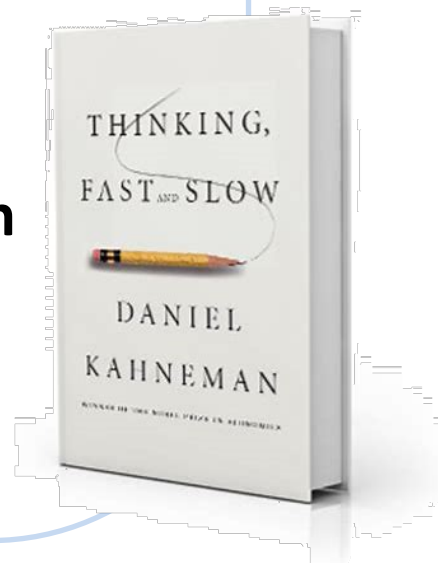
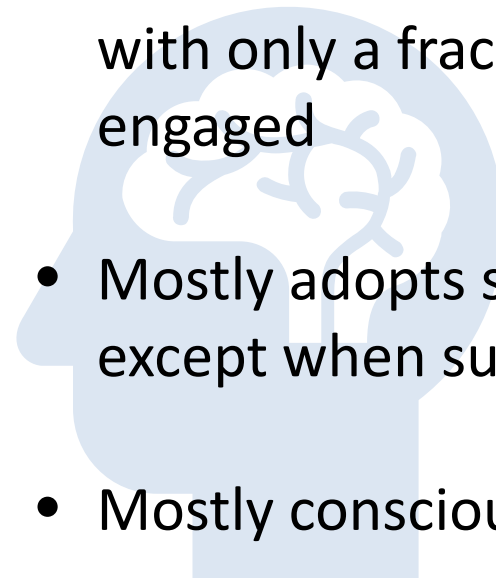
System 1

- **Fast** thinking, **automatic**, effortless
- Continuously generates suggestions for system 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions and feelings
- Calls on system 2 when it runs into difficulty
- **Mostly unconscious**
- Very fast and efficient because it uses approximations and **biases**
- You can't turn it off!



System 2

- **Slow** thinking, **effortful**
- Most of the time in low-effort mode with only a fraction of its capacity engaged
- Mostly adopts system 1 suggestions except when surprised or requested
- Mostly conscious
- More accurate if available – under some circumstances like stress it **can become unavailable**





Breakout session

Did you ever notice more judgemental thoughts when you are tired or emotional ?

Part 2

Self-awareness

Who does your System 1 like?

In group – “we” / out group – “them”



1. More empathy for in group, less for out group members
2. Not all out groups are treated the same

In-group

- a group you are part of (genetically, culturally, or ideologically)

out-group

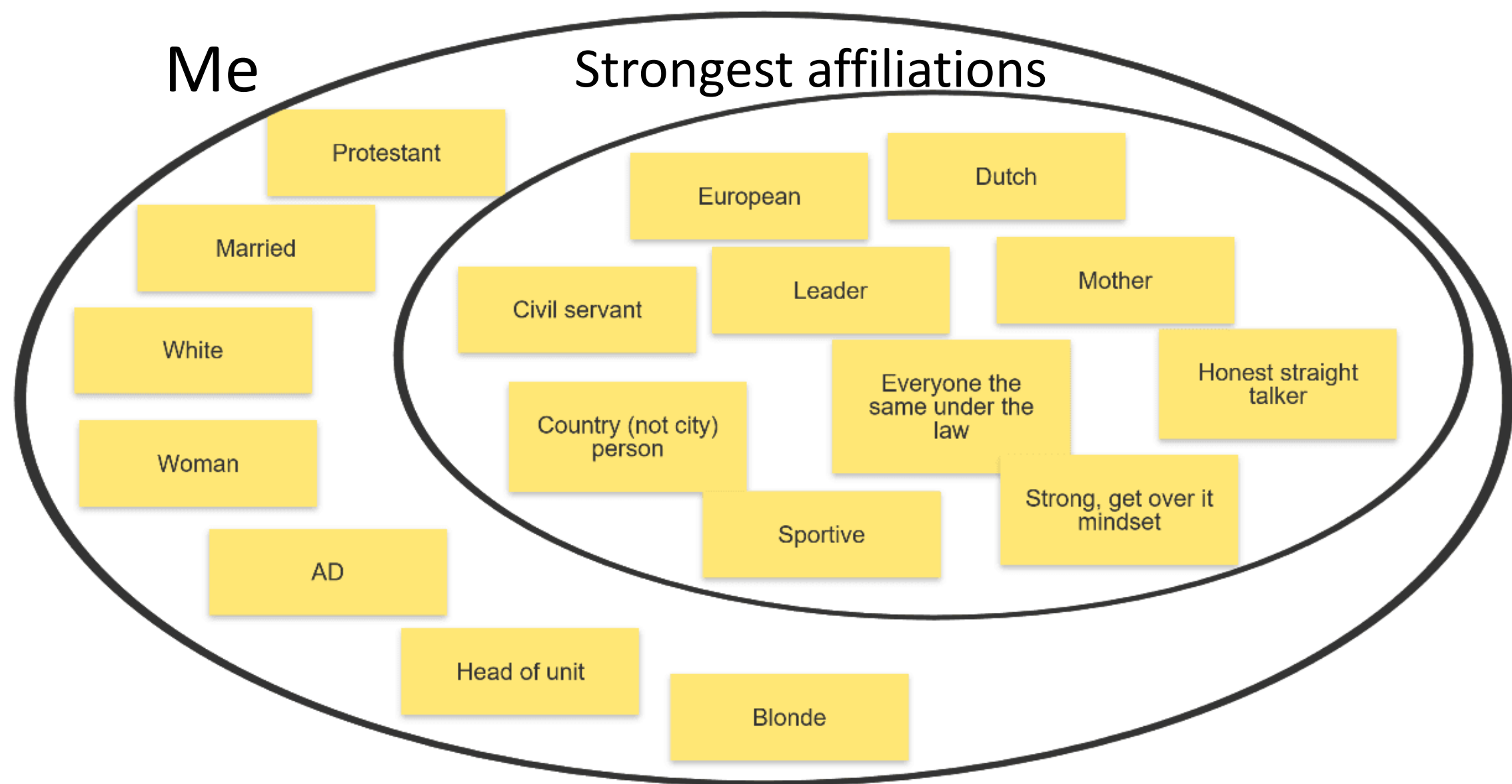
- a group you aren't part of



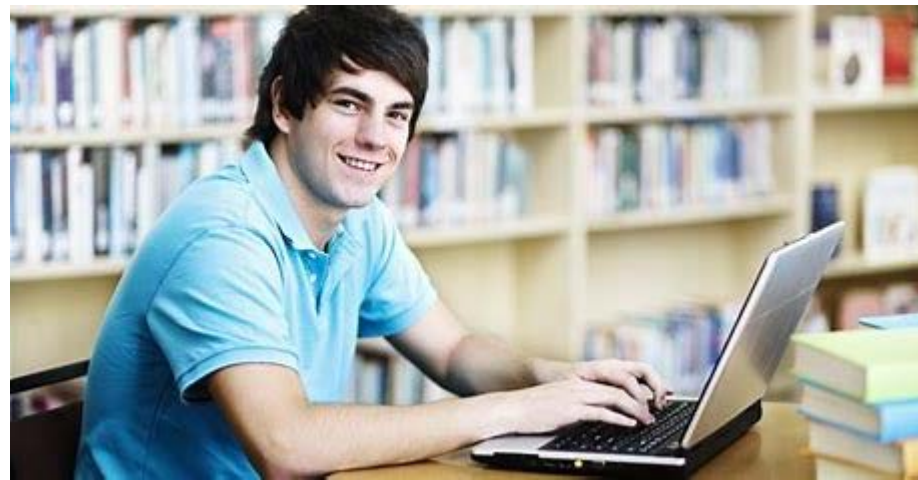
What are my strongest in-group affiliations?

Your personal in-groups: define your strongest affiliations

Illustration

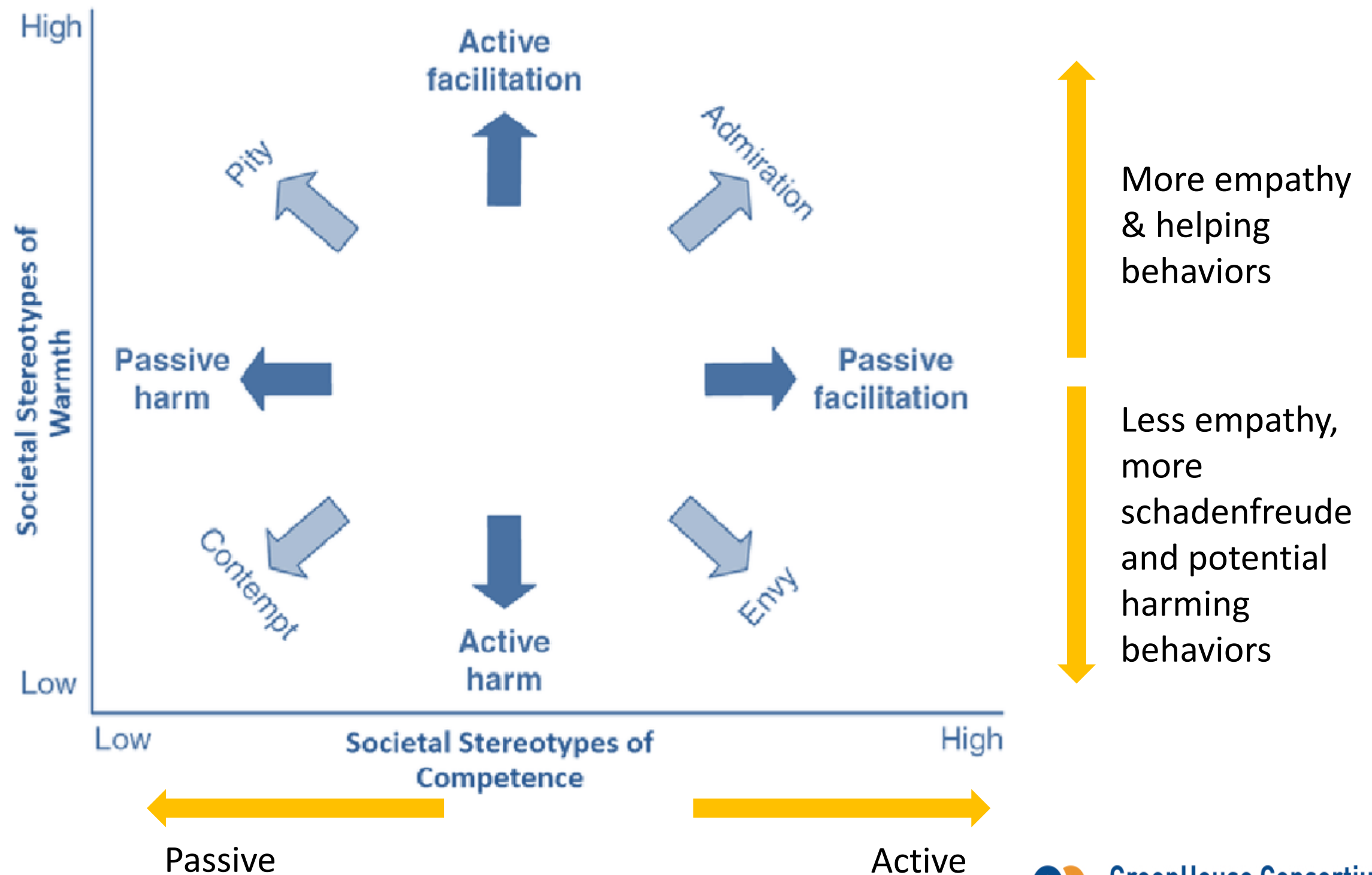


Imagine this person sitting on a chewing gum in the park – how do you feel?



Who did you feel
strongest for? What kind
of emotions did you feel?

Admiration, envy, pity and contempt modulate empathy and helping behaviors





Make a link back to your direct reports and key stakeholders

Who are the people you need to pay attention to, one way or the other?

	Who	In group	Out group	Admire	Envy	Pity	Contempt
Direct reports	BL	Portuguese				yes	
	PT		Always negative				
	AD	Rides horses					
	PK						
Key stakeholders	JP	Woman		yes			
	GT				yes		
	XE		Authoritarian				yes
	ML						



Breakout session

Try the exercise for one person

-

Finalize the rest for session 2

The leader of a fortune 100 company – fast, what image comes to your mind?

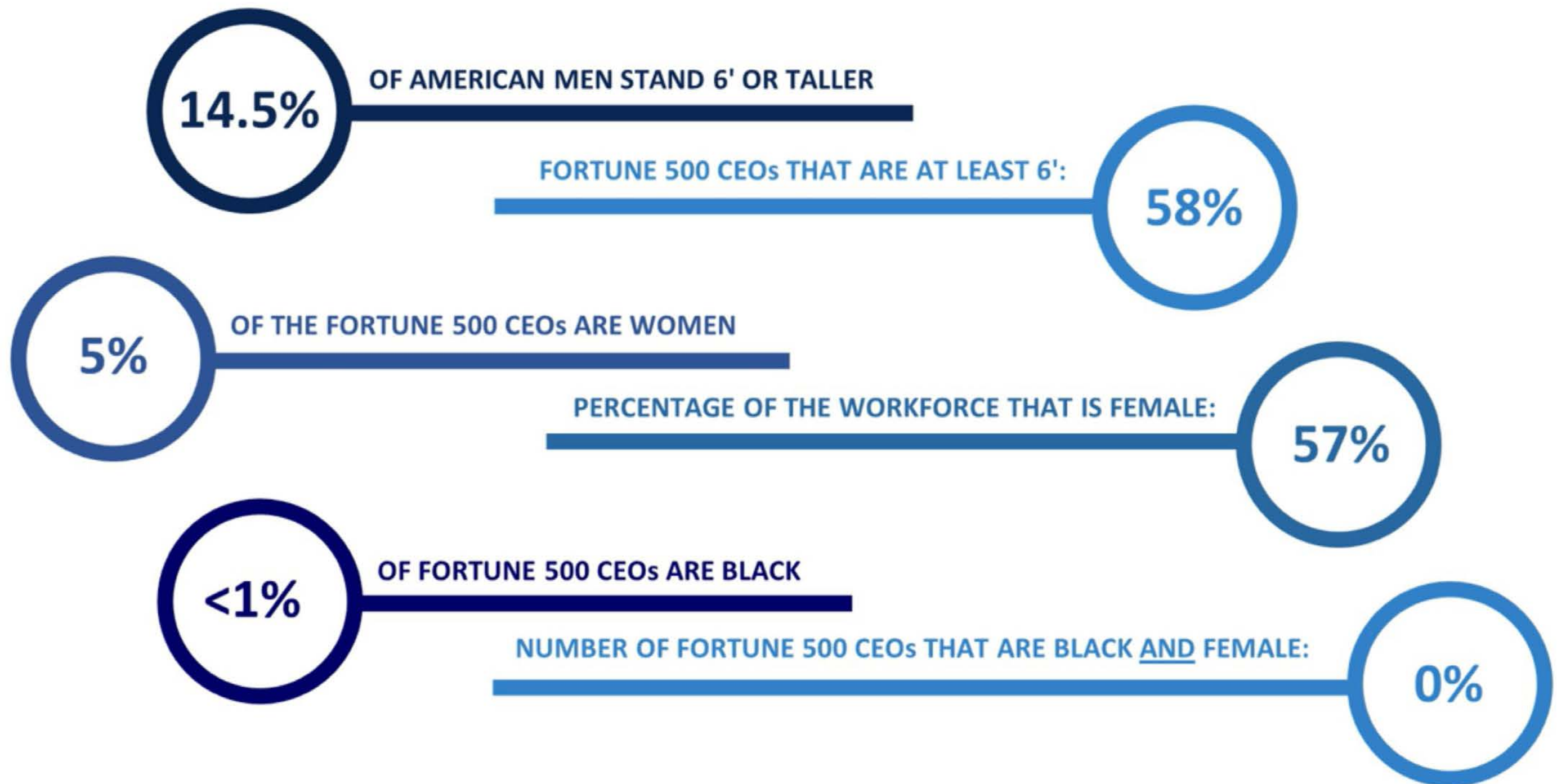
How many of these statements were true?

- Man
- White
- Middle aged – older
- Tall
- Well dressed/groomed
- Symmetric features

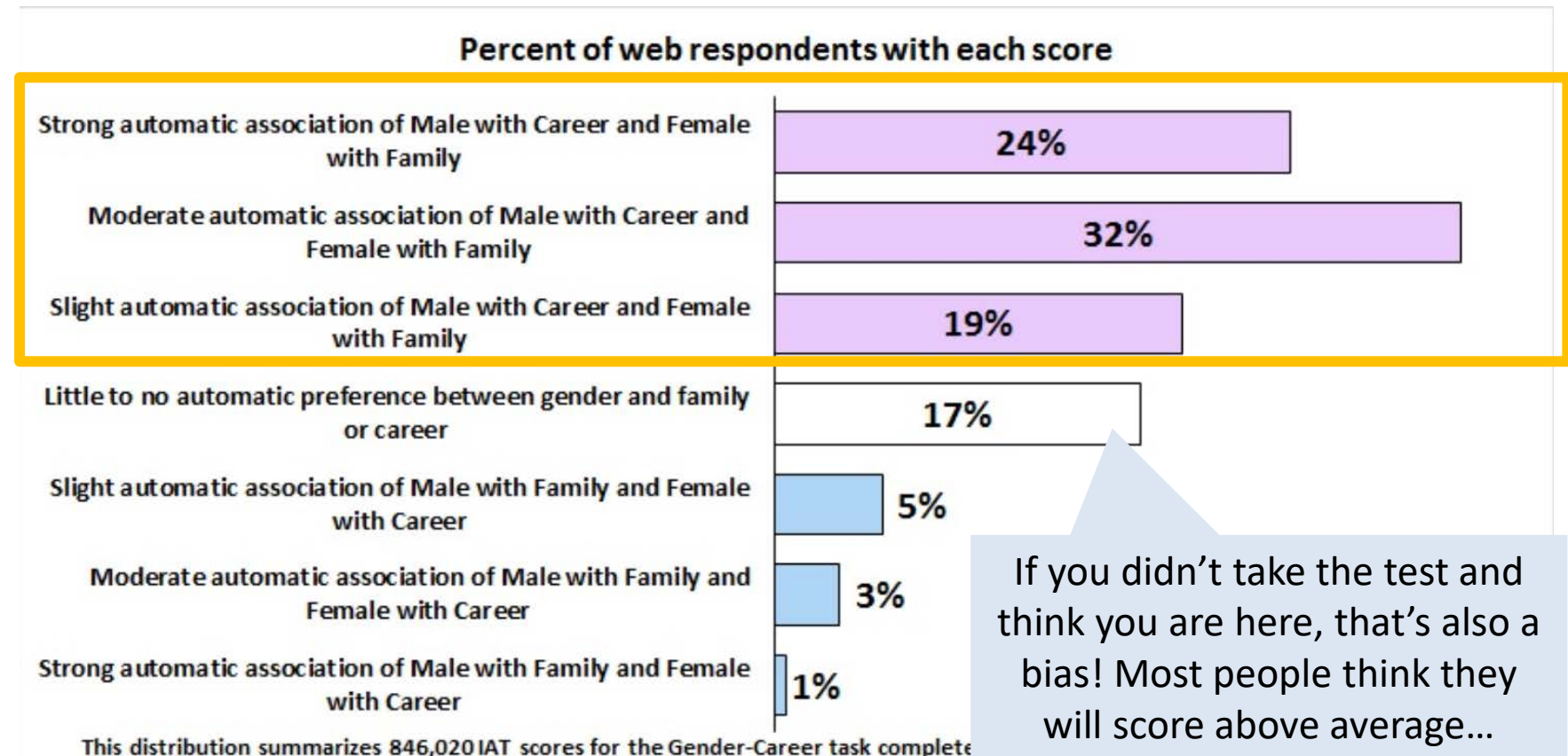
System 1 is about stereotypes and quick judgements: good/bad, valuable/not-valuable, this is what a leader looks like, this is what a lazy person looks like etc.

Implicit Leadership Theory – we hold an implicit image of what a leader looks like in our mind and use it to evaluate other's leadership ability, some of these, like size, have nothing to do with leadership

Real world consequences



IAT - Large majority associates career with male and female with family (75%)



It is possible for a woman to have more empathy for another woman (in group effect) and at the same time be biased towards the male candidates for a senior leadership position (Implicit leadership effect)

Examples of real-life consequences

A greater pro-white bias on the IAT resulted in

- Increased likelihood of prescribing thrombolytics for White patients compared to Blacks presenting with acute coronary syndrome (Green, 2007).
- A greater inclination to prescribe pain medications for White versus Black children (Sabin, 2012).
- Poorer ratings of interpersonal care among Black patients (Cooper, 2012).

Other examples

- Fictitious resumes with White-sounding names sent to help-wanted ads were more likely to receive callbacks for interviews compared to resumes with African-American sounding names. Resumes with White-sounding names received 50% more callbacks for interviews (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).
- Science faculty rated male applicants for a laboratory manager position as significantly more competent and hireable than female applicants. Faculty also selected a higher starting salary and offered more career mentoring to the male applicant (Moss-Racusin et al, 2012).

What about in the institutions? What could the consequences be here?



What associations do you make? How could they affect your role as a manager?

Think about some associations you may have that are not (always) grounded in reality

Examples

very confident =
very competent

shy =
uninteresting

beautiful and well
dressed = worth
getting to know

careful wording =
not trust worthy

sportive =
capable

Talks too much =
arrogant

asks a lot of
questions = not
competent

How could these biases impact you in your role as a manager?

A small bias can have a huge effect over time – confirmation bias

The urn experiment – pick a lottery ticket from one of the two urns



Information 1

++

Information 2

+

Information 3

++ or more

Information 4

+

Information 5

=

=

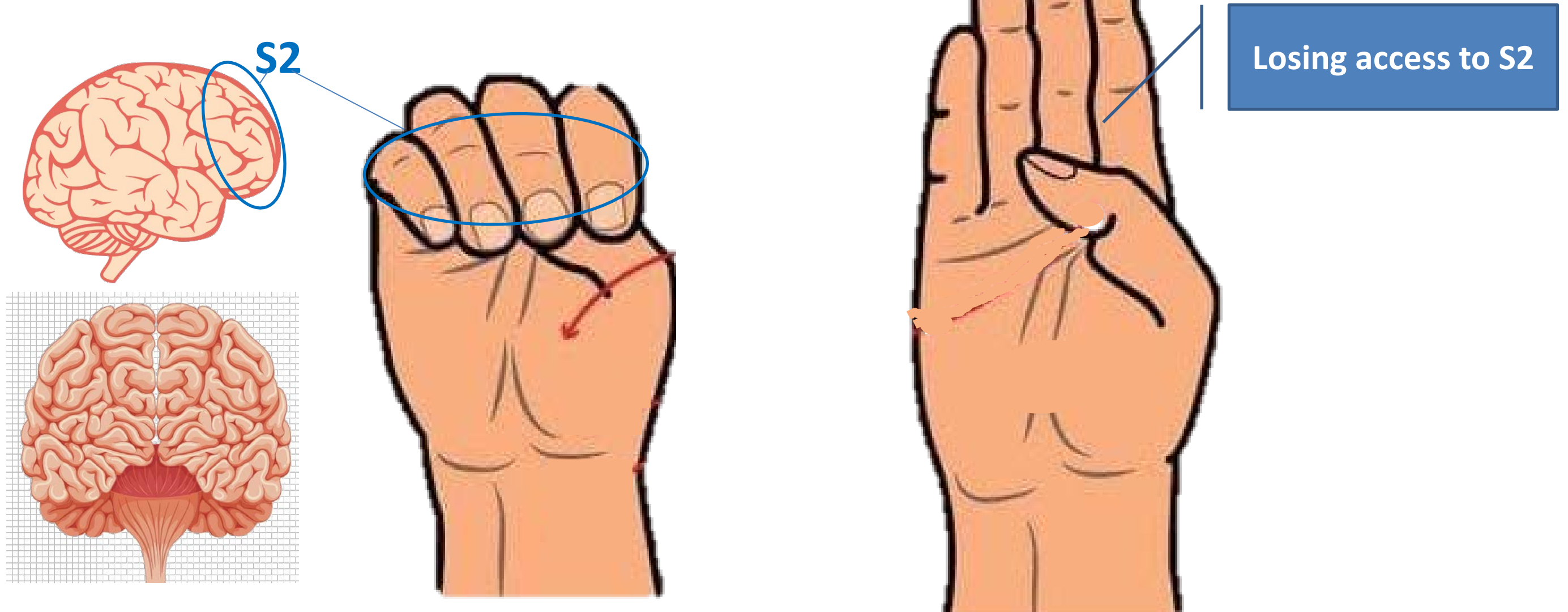
We only change our minds if
there is 30% increase in favor
of urn B!

Exercises

Try this between
sessions 1 and 2

Notice when you “lose your cap” – practice getting it back on or delay important conversations

The hand model of the brain



Try asking yourself every hour “how do I feel?”

Ways you can put your cap back on

Recommended:

For 3-4 weeks set up an hourly alarm and ask yourself how do you feel, is your cap on or off? If off, do one of these exercises, do this until you don't need the alarm anymore and it becomes automatic

- Sugar – but only in case of emergency
- Stretch + Breathing exercise – 5 sec in, 5 sec out for a minute or two
- Stretch + Mindfulness meditation – even a minute or two can work
- Positive mood, e.g. watching a funny video, looking at cute pictures
- Motivation, why am I doing this? This is important to me/will benefit others
- Music, focusing on any of your senses (smell something nice, touch something interesting, look at something beautiful)
- Taking a fresh perspective – thinking about someone like yourself engaging in a restorative activity

Create a daily bias awareness journal

Write about three bias related reactions you noticed in yourself or others and the way you dealt with them

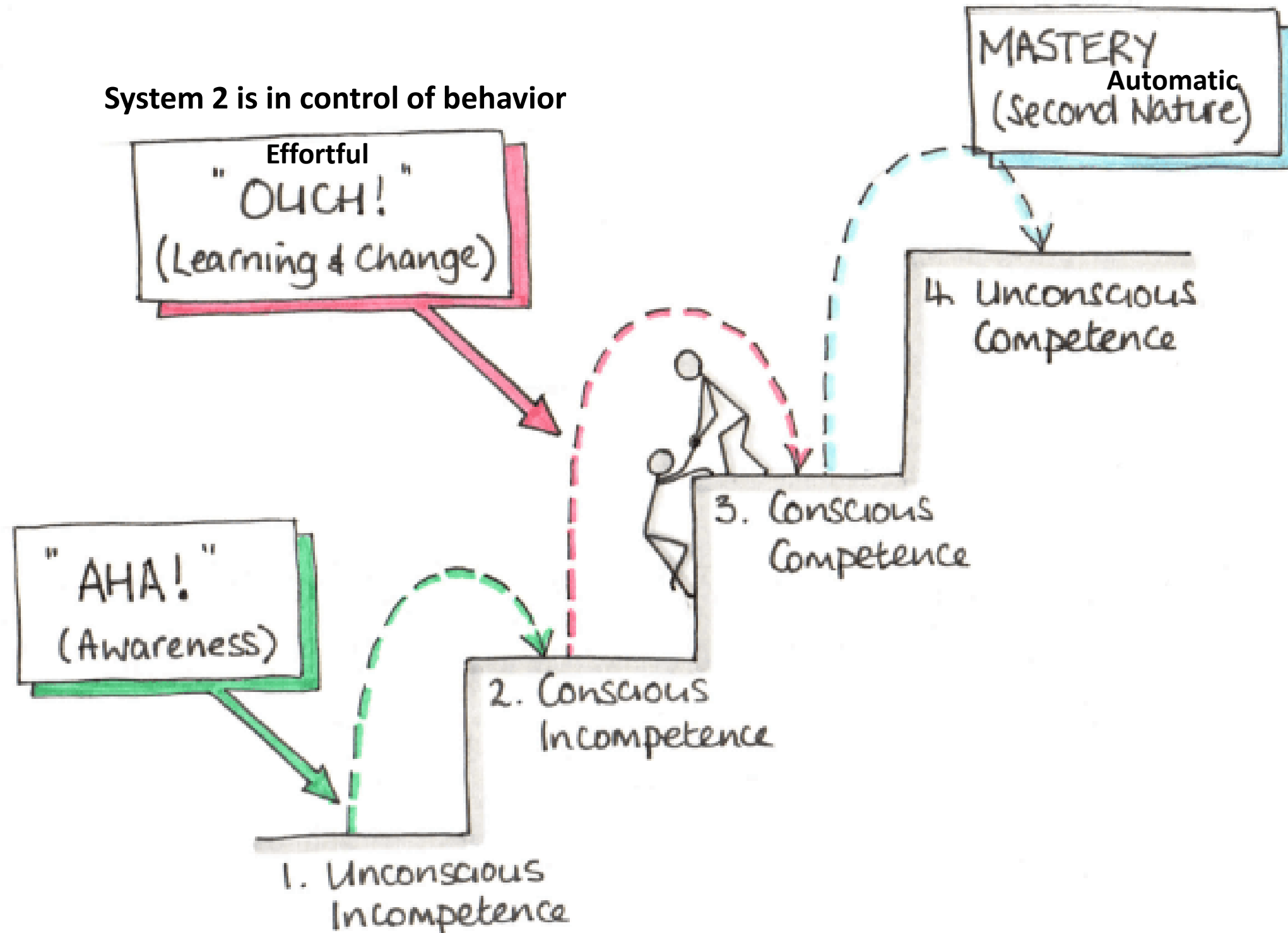
- E.g. The phone rang, I saw his name and didn't want to answer, I took a deep breath, smiled, tried to channel all the warmth I could and answered
- E.g. She came into the office with a huge smile, twinkling eyes, nicely dressed, the conversation was smooth, and I felt at ease. If I wasn't her boss, we would be best friends. Before going through her document I focused and reminded myself that I need to look at her work with the same critical eye I use for the others.
- E.g. I've met a new person today; my immediate reaction was pff...boring! I thanked my system 1 for this fast assessment and decided to dig a bit deeper, trying to find common ground and interesting aspects about this person
- E.g. When I read the title of this article, I noticed I didn't want to read it because it would likely contain evidence against one of my strong beliefs I took a deep breath and decided to read it anyway and hold each argument in my mind without immediately trying to dismiss it

Recommended:

Do this at least for 3-4 weeks until it becomes automatic. Write it down or tell it to someone.

Practice these tasks until they become automatic

Automatic behavior facilitated by System 1
I can do this even if I'm tired or stressed



Self-awareness summary

Who are the people I need to be most careful with? When does it matter most?

What are the stereotypical associations I need to be mindful about? When does it matter most?

What can I put in place to maintain (and eventually increase) this level of self-awareness over time?

Session 2

What is the most interesting or surprising thing you learned while doing the exercises?

Today – think through these key management challenges

- Recruitment
- Selection of assignments
- Evaluations and promotions
- Trust and connection

Reflect & share with your colleagues, listen to some external ideas, keep what works for you

My unconscious bias prevention and mitigation plan

During today's session, write down the ideas that you want to try

Challenge	Solution I want to try

A few well-known biases that impact people management

Affinity & similarity bias

- The tendency to judge people we like more favorably & the tendency to surround ourselves with people who are similar to us

Halo and horns effect

- When we see one great thing about a person, and we let the halo glow of that significant thing affect our opinions of everything else about that person. We are in awe of them due to one thing (e.g. they went to Harvard) or the opposite for the horns effect

Attention & Perception bias

- Our beliefs and stereotypes influence what we pay attention to and thus what we will see

Confirmation bias & reduction of cognitive dissonance

- The tendency for people to seek information that confirms preexisting beliefs or assumptions – system 2 looks for information to confirm system 1's impressions, if information is found that goes against strong beliefs it is distorted

Availability bias

- If you can think about it easily then it must be important – e.g. Only remembering the events of the past month for an annual evaluation; if you know one person, even if it's only through tabloids, to whom something happened then there must be many

Pygmalion/Rosenthal effect

- A compound of the previous effects: our beliefs about others impact our actions towards others with impact their beliefs about themselves in turn influencing their actions towards us, a self-fulfilling prophecy

Today

- Recruitment
- Selection of assignments
- Evaluations and promotions
- Trust and connection

Bias can impact each step of the recruitment process

- Definition of the role
- Definition of the selection committee
- Generation of candidates
- Definition of the candidate pool
- Selection process



Breakout session

What challenges did you notice for each step? How could you try to mitigate the impact?

Mitigating bias in recruitment – best practices (I/II)

- **Definition of the role**
 - Review the wording for cultural bias that will discourage some to apply – some tools can help (see <https://textio.com/>)
 - Do a stereotype check and focus on expected results rather than personality traits or personal attributes
 - Limit your job requirements to “must-haves” and don’t use unnecessary jargon
- **Definition of the selection committee**
 - Avoid too homogeneous selection committees
 - Ideally people with some self-awareness regarding their own biases
- **Generation of candidates**
 - Broaden the potential pool of candidates, e.g. ask underrepresented minorities to share to their networks
 - Reach out to minorities who might not spontaneously apply
- **Definition of the candidate pool**
 - Use the “must-haves” and expected results from the role definition to clarify what you are looking for in the CVs before looking at the applications (avoid “halo effect”)
 - Have someone blind the CVs of their names, pictures and other potentially biasing information before looking at them
 - Make sure you have more than one candidate from a minority

Stereotype check

1. What comes to mind when thinking of the ideal person in this role? First image, no filter, write down each detail of what immediately comes to your mind
2. For each word, ask yourself if and when it's useful for the role
3. What is the expected result in the current role?
4. What other attributes/skills could lead to the same result?

Stereotype	Usefulness	Expected result	Alternative attributes/skills
White	None - ! Bias risk!		
Man	None - ! Bias risk!		
Tall	None - ! Bias risk!		
Assertive	Useful to align people	Align people	Influencing skills
Sense of humour	Useful to fit in culture	People trust the candidate	Ability to connect with people

Illustration

Mitigating bias in recruitment – best practices (II/II)

- Selection process
 - Make sure each person in the selection committee has done a stereotype check exercise for the role and is aware of their potential traps
 - Organize the interviews with enough time for breaks so people on the selection committee are still fresh for the last candidates
 - Use structured interviews with questions focused on each of the expected results (e.g. tell us about a time when you dealt with a team member who didn't meet expectations)
 - Rate each candidate immediately after the interview, preferably using interview scorecards with clear scoring criteria grounded in your role definition

Today

- Recruitment
- Selection of assignments
- Evaluations and promotions
- Trust and connection

How are “office housework” and “glamour work” assigned?



What is the glamour work
and office house work in
your team? How are they
assigned?

Today

- Recruitment
- Selection of assignments
- Evaluations and promotions
- Trust and connection

What biases did you notice in evaluations and promotions? What could be done?

Mitigating bias evaluations and promotions – best practices

- Avoid the recency effect – take regular notes
- When possible, take input about people from different sources, recognizing that they too have biases but perhaps a different set of biases than you
- Try to be as specific as possible, reflecting on agreed upon expected outcomes, if possible, standardize the process, especially for promotions
- Letting your system 1 unchecked, ask yourself what stereotype associations you are making for this person and how they impact your judgement of them - Watch out for biases in wording grounded in these stereotypes (e.g. nice and chatty versus good people skills and strong communicator)
- Don't cram your evaluations all in one go, take a quiet reflection time for each person
- Ask yourself on a regular basis, is my judgement of this person still valid? Can I think of signs this person made progress? Regressed? Watch out for attention/perception/confirmation bias – take the time to search for signs of progress / ask others

Today

- Recruitment
 - Selection of assignments
 - Evaluations and promotions
- Trust and connection

Take the time to get to know people

Managers with a bias (as measured in IAT) don't necessarily treat people worse, they tend to ignore them

① ACKNOWLEDGED



② IGNORED



③ SHREDDED



From a motivational perspective, ignoring people is as bad as shredding their work in front of them!

A few additional ideas

- Take more time to listen to people who are not in your in group – schedule a lunch or coffee just to get to know them
- Expand your in group – some people have very small in groups while others include animals, plants..., go out of your comfort zone and built trust with a wider group
- If a person's behavior appears stupid, selfish, mean... to you, discuss with someone else until you are capable to see a positive driver behind the behavior – most people are not stupid, mean or selfish...
- Find the qualities of your out groups – what can I learn from them? It's much easier to see their short comings and pitfalls than their qualities. If you can't identify them, ask someone else to help you
- Schedule sensitive conversations and performance reviews at a moment in the day when you know you will be fresh

Summary

1. Everybody is biased, it is how your brain can work so fast
2. In some situations, with some people, these biases can be problematic – it is important to recognize what these situations and/or these people are
3. Depending on who you are and what matters to you, you don't have exactly the same biases as your colleague – know your own biases
4. When you are tired, stressed, hungry, have focused for too long biased thinking gets worse
5. The most important thing you can do is be self-aware: of your potential biases and of your own state
6. Practice until self-awareness becomes automatic
7. With awareness comes the potential to set up mitigating strategies – practice until these become automatic