

Unconscious Bias in Management

Handout



In-Group vs. Out-Group

In-Group

- People we identify with
- We naturally trust, support, and include them
- We assume positive intent & competence

Out-Group

- People we see as “different from us”
- Harder to trust or connect with
- We may overlook or undervalue their contributions

Our brain uses quick cues to decide who belongs...often without us realising it.



Affinity Bias

Feeling a stronger connection to those who are similar to us, we are more receptive to people who are like ourselves.

Who do you naturally ‘click’ with at work—and who might you be unintentionally overlooking?

Halo & Horns Effect

The tendency for positive or negative impressions of a person in one area to positively or negatively influence one's opinion or feelings in other areas.



We assume everything about a person must be great because we like something about them, and vice versa.



Perception Bias

Our expectations, beliefs and stereotypes influence what we pay attention to.

Attention and assumptions about different groups create filters that affect what we perceive.

Confirmation Bias

Processing information in a way that supports our personal beliefs, prior experience, or ideas and ignores details to the contrary. It supports our need to be “right.”



Proximity Bias

Giving preferential treatment to those who are physically closest — especially common in hybrid workplaces. Remote employees often feel as though they are “out of sight, out of mind” as they’re overlooked for projects and promotions over their in-office peers.



Attribution Bias

A systematic error we make when evaluating our own and other people's behaviors.

We tend to attribute **others' actions to their character or personality**, while attributing **our behavior to external situational factors outside of our control**.



Contrast Effect

The tendency to evaluate an employee relative to other employees rather than on the records of employee achievements or planned job duties, responsibilities and goals.



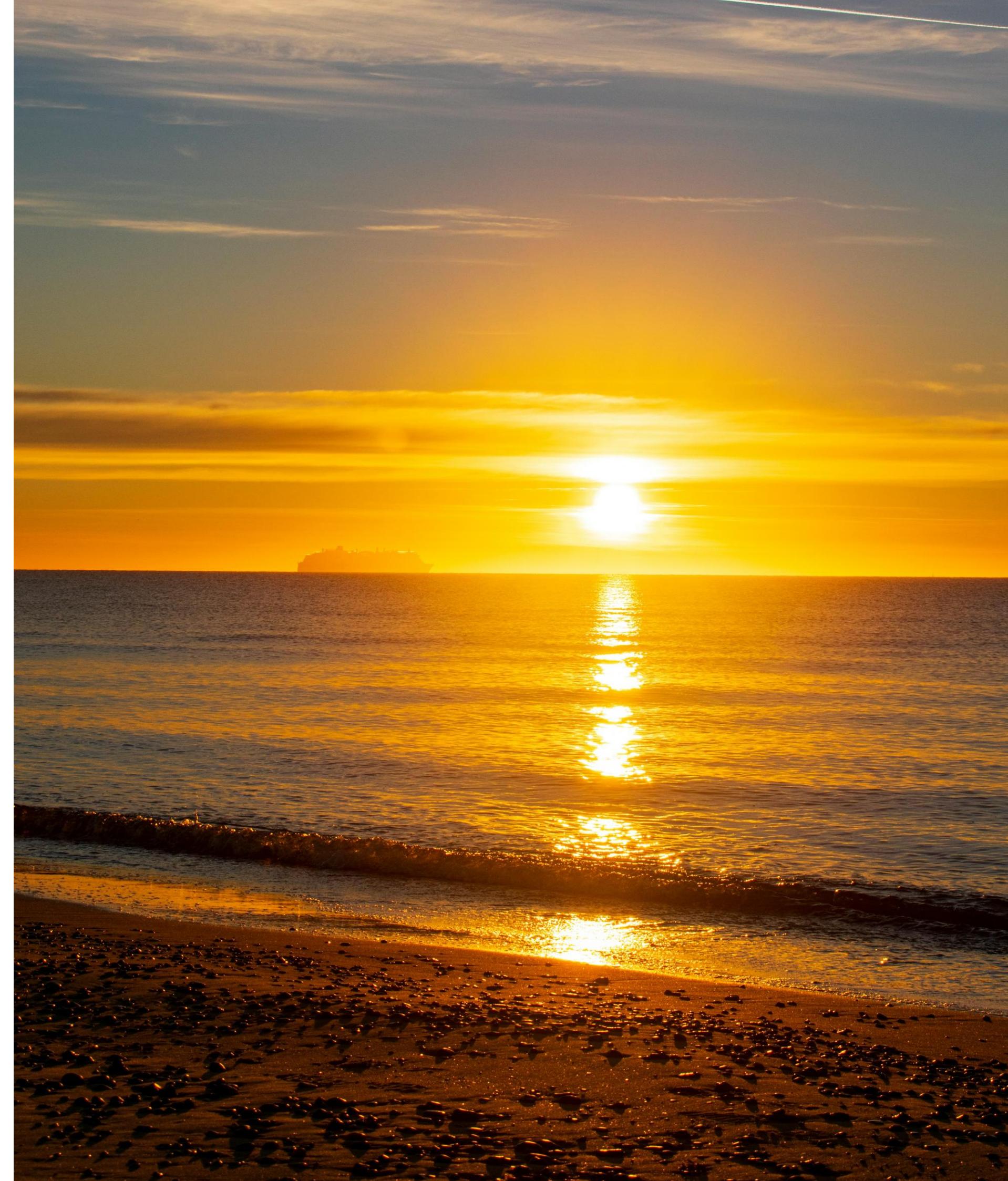


The big bang

The tendency to remember a big and bad event which then slants the assessment for the whole year.

The golden moment

The tendency to remember a fantastic event which then casts a glow over the whole appraisal.



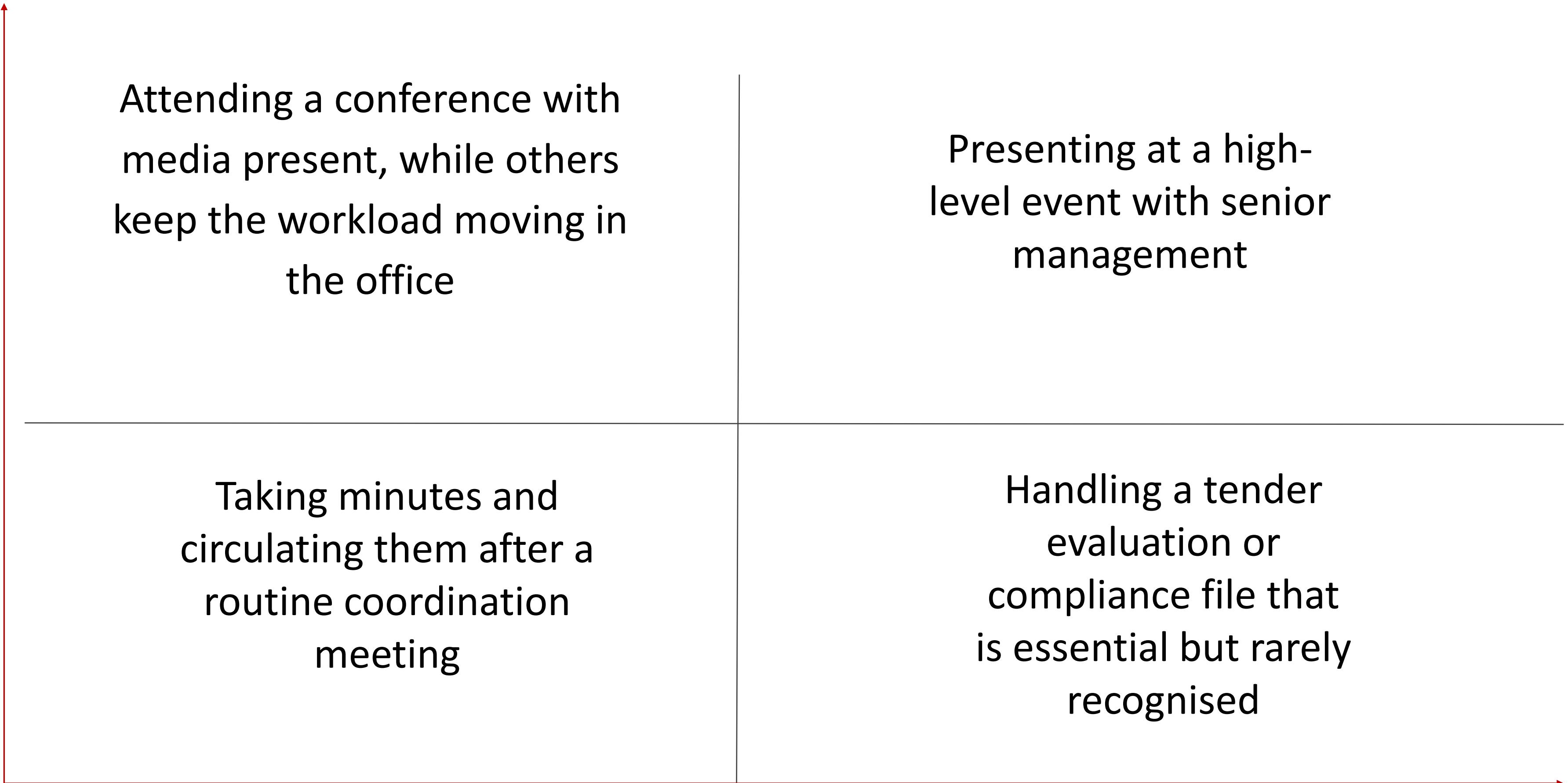
Avoiding Bias in Performance Evaluations

- Use job descriptions, agreed goals, or competency frameworks as the basis for assessment
- Keep regular notes during the year to reduce recency bias
- Gather feedback from multiple sources, while recognising each brings its own bias
- Reflect on any stereotype associations that may shape your judgement
- Be careful with wording that reflects stereotypes (e.g. “detail-obsessed” vs “thorough”)
- Regularly check if your judgement is still valid and look for evidence of progress or decline, staying alert to attention, perception, and confirmation bias

Task Allocation



Visibility



Importance

Addressing bias with tact

Open Questions

- “What makes you say that?”
- “What criteria are we using to make this decision?”
- “Can you tell me more about what led you to that conclusion?”

Inviting Broader Perspectives

- “How might someone with a different background view this?”
- “What are we not considering yet?”
- “Whose voice might be missing from this discussion?”

Encouraging Reflection

- “Do you think any assumptions might be influencing us here?”
- “I wonder if we’re favoring familiarity over new perspectives.”
- “Let’s pause and check if we’re judging based on facts or impressions.”



“Loaded”/Biased language vs. “Clean”/Unbiased language

“You’re always late.”

“You don’t respect me.”

“It’s your fault.”

“You never listen.”

“I noticed you arrived after the start of the meeting.”

“I feel very uncomfortable when people raise their voice. Could you please lower your tone?”

“This is what I noticed, and this is the impact it had.”

“I have the impression my point was not considered.”

“Loaded”/Biased language vs. “Clean”/Unbiased language

In pairs or small groups, rewrite the following loaded statements in a way that they describe **specific behaviors and impacts** rather than blame or assumptions.



- “You’re always negative about new ideas.”
- “You don’t care about this project.”
- “You’re impossible to work with.”
- “You never support my decisions.”
- “You clearly don’t listen to instructions.”
- Your own example:



When are we most prone to Bias?

Cognitive & Emotional Triggers

- Stress or emotional pressure
- Time pressure / urgency
- Cognitive overload or multitasking
- Ambiguity or unclear criteria
- Groupthink / social pressure

Physiological Triggers

- Fatigue / lack of sleep
- Hunger
- Dehydration



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Why It Matters

Under these circumstances, our brains rely more on **shortcuts** and **stereotypes** than on deliberate, fair thinking.

Tools to counteract your own bias in the moment

Pause & Breathe (The Micro-Pause)

- When you notice stress, fatigue, or time pressure: stop, inhale twice, exhale for longer than you inhaled, ask yourself: *“Am I making this decision automatically, or intentionally?”*
- Even a 10-second pause disrupts bias.

Flip the Perspective

- Ask: *“If this person were different in gender, age, or background, would I be making the same judgment?”*
- This quick mental check often reveals hidden bias.

Check with Criteria

- Go back to **predefined criteria** (e.g., job description, agreed standards, goals) instead of relying on gut feeling.
- Especially helpful in hiring, promotions, and performance reviews.

