



## Employment and Disability Project

Morocco Tunisia Benin Senegal

# Stereotypes, cognitive biases and discrimination

Factsheet

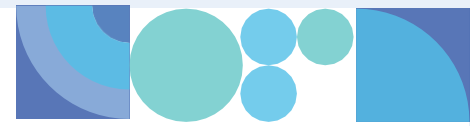
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### Why this factsheet?

To enable businesses and employment stakeholders to become aware of :

- The fact that we all have cognitive biases, linked to stereotypes
- That these stereotypes can lead to unintentional discrimination



# From cognitive biases to stereotypes

## • Cognitive biases

We all have stereotypes. These stereotypes build up prejudices and prejudices sometimes lead us to discriminate positively or negatively against a person.

This is known as cognitive bias.

Cognitive bias is a shortcut in our brain that allows us to quickly analyse a situation. This mechanism dates back to prehistoric times.

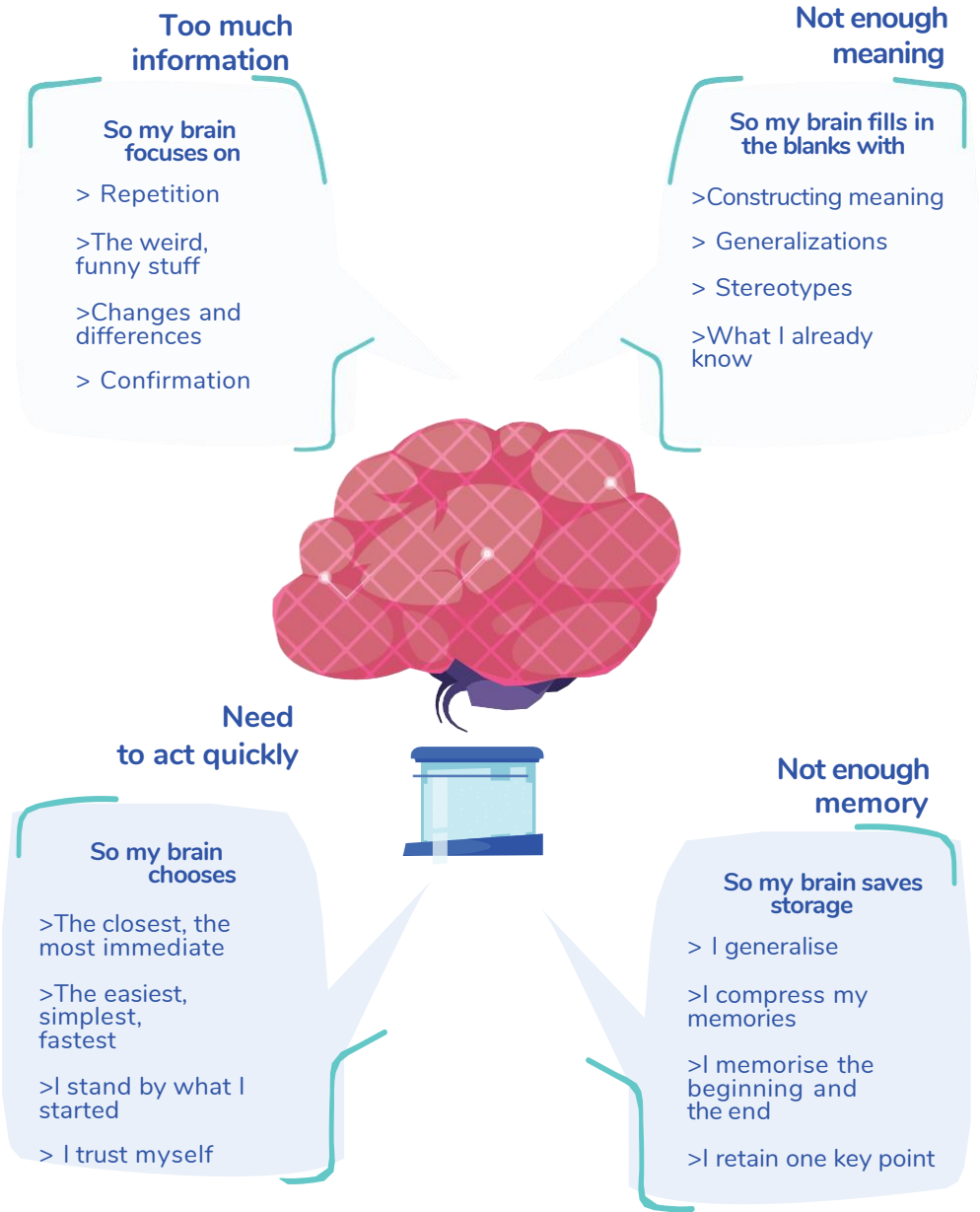
We lived in a hostile world, and our brains had to react quickly in order to survive.

This legacy still leads us today to make shortcuts based on an unconsidered first impression.

**This is inevitable:** our brain cannot assimilate, process and analyse all the information it receives: it filters it by practising cognitive economy. In today's complex world, this cognitive functioning can be inadequate. It leads to errors in reasoning (stereotypes), which lead to errors in decision-making (including discrimination).

so people know nothing about disability and the realities of people, their difficulties, their abilities, etc.

Testimonial



“ In our society, people without disabilities do not mix with people with disabilities. They do not go to the same schools,



- The halo effect

One of the most common cognitive biases in recruitment is the 'halo effect'.

The halo effect <sup>1</sup> (sometimes called the halo error) is the tendency to make certain characteristics of a group, brand or person more positive (or conversely more negative). The opinion is formed without

knowing the person, and without checking the information, because of membership of a group, on the basis of information received from friends and family or the media, or on the basis of a physical feature. This halo effect influences the first impression one has of a person, and creates the stereotype that leads to discrimination.

- The Pygmalion effect

This is another common bias in the field of disability. The way others see us can have a big influence on how we are or how we behave, which may lead us to want to fit the image that others have of us. We end up accepting and believing this image. The Pygmalion effect occurs when we change our behaviour to conform to this image.

If we perceive people with disabilities as incapable or victims, or if we put them down, they will lose confidence, self-esteem and become more vulnerable. They will end up behaving in ways that confirm these prejudices.

*"I thought that disability was synonymous with incapacity. I realised when I saw a worker in a wheelchair on a production line that there was nothing to stop this lad from working at a specific pace."*

*You just had to remember to provide a table so that he could do his job and undertake his allocated tasks. He did exactly what was asked of him.*

Mr Zeïd Souabni, Tunisia

*"When they see the walker behind me, they understand that I have a disability. Some say to me: God heal you. Others say prayers or invoke God. There are also those who do not speak to me."*

*They talk to my colleague alongside. Sometimes, when tired, I let my colleague answer for me, letting them think that I am not able to answer.*

Testimonial

Our brains tend to categorise people. "He's part of my group and that makes me feel better,

he is not part of my group, so it scares me. I feel uncomfortable and have feelings of rejection towards this person."

*"In our society, people have a vision of the disabled person as a Mbehlla\*, who does not speak properly, who is scruffy, who cannot take care of himself. For them, a person with a disability is side-lined, self-effacing, withdrawn, has no opinion. As people see that I can do all this by myself and that*

*I don't fit the image they have of a disabled person, they think I'm not disabled and that I'm just acting! It's crazy that in the end, everything that I manage to do counts against me!*

Testimonial, Morocco

\* A person who is poorly cared for, in Arabic

Conversely, if we overestimate or overvalue a worker with disabilities (you are a fighter, you perform well despite your disability...), he or she will try to keep up to match this positive image.

However, these are often people who are pushing themselves to prove that they can do the job, sometimes overcompensating to the detriment of their own health, which can lead to accidents at work and/or sick leave.

There are more than 100 types of cognitive bias

to avoid in recruitment <sup>2</sup>!

*"I don't like being dependent and I don't want my disability to be an obstacle. I have to prove that I can do it alone."*

*I know that I have to try harder not to show that my disability is a weakness.*

Testimonial

<sup>1</sup>First identified in 1920 by the American psychologist Edward Thorndike (1874-1949), this effect was demonstrated in 1946 by the Polish-born American psychologist Solomon E. Asch (1907-1996).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.penser-critique.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/codex-biais-cognitifs.pdf>



## Case study

Redouan, a disabled worker, makes enormous efforts during a year-long fixed-term contract to prove that he is as good as his colleagues. When he moves to a permanent contract, he falls ill. His managers and colleagues are convinced that he has done it on purpose and that he waited until he had a secure job to take advantage of the system.

In reality, due to the lack of consideration for his disability and appropriate compensation measures during his fixed-term contract, Redouan pushed himself to the point of exhaustion and eventually fell ill.

To identify over-motivation and over-commitment, ask yourself:

- > Would an ordinary worker be so committed, or are they doing it to prove a point?
- > Does Redouan keep to his break times and working hours, or does he do more?
- > Does he bring work home?

The aim is to get the employer to ask themselves: is the person's intense work level sustainable over time?

The way people with disabilities are seen and prejudged has serious consequences.

A responsible, respectful and fair view of people who may encounter difficulties, such as disability, will enable them to take their rightful place.

## From stereotypes to discrimination at work

### • Stereotypes and their repercussions

Stereotypes, constructed by our culture, beliefs and upbringing, can lead us to discriminate.

Discrimination in the workplace is often committed

### Examples

"I can't recruit a candidate in a wheelchair for a sales position because the role involves a lot of travel. I think I'm doing this person a favour by ruling them out."

This is discrimination. Objectively, a salesperson can handle a number of tasks remotely and a person in a wheelchair can drive or travel by accessible transport.

"I'm recruiting this deaf candidate, because the 'poor thing' has no chance." In countries where religion is very prominent, charity towards

unintentionally or as a result of a decision that we believe to be better for the person with a disability. To overcome this subjective view, the method involves analyzing the information objectively.

people with disabilities has an important place. Companies want above all to help them, to protect them, to be charitable. They are not primarily interested in the skills of people with disabilities, but in their disability. People with disabilities are categorised as being unable to be productive. They may then be given "meaningless" jobs in which they will not thrive. They may become depressed and lose hope of finding a job in line with their skills.



At first I was reluctant to recruit a hearing impaired person. I agreed to meet with Vivien to gather some information on which to base my refusal.

But honestly, I was simply amazed by him.

Testimonial  
Aurélien H. Egue,  
Novotel, Benin



- What are the stereotypes about disability?

We often hear:

"A person with a disability is less productive, often ill, often off work, not able to work,

is going to create issues in my team, I won't be able to say anything to them for fear of hurting their feelings."

### What's going on?



Objectively, company statistics show that disabled workers are not off work more than other workers. Any employee can take time off for flu or to look after a sick child.

Similarly, an adapted workstation will enable a disabled worker to be as effective as his or her colleagues.



Most people think that people with disabilities are sick and off work all the time.

A disabled person is not necessarily sick, just as a sick person is not necessarily disabled!

Our workers with disabilities have taught us about diligence and punctuality, they were always in work.

Testimony of Ferial Kennou, lab company, Tunisia



### Case study

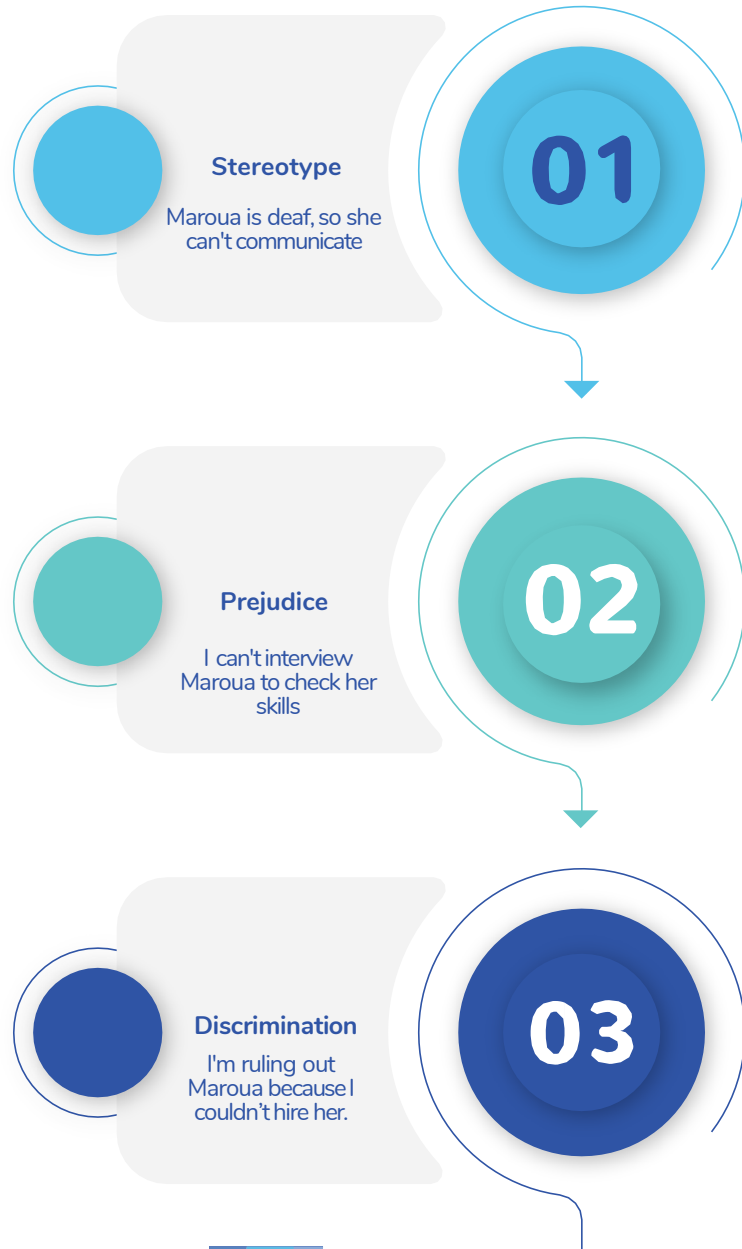
My name is Maroua, I am profoundly deaf. I have a master's degree in finance.

I have done many internships in my field of expertise. I don't have any communication problems because I learned to lip read and I am able to speak through speech therapy.

My only problem is that I can't communicate on the phone. However, I can't secure job interviews. The reason is that most recruiters contact me by phone. When I explain to them that I am deaf, I don't hear back from them.



## What is happening to Maroua?



### If we analyze her situation objectively:

Maroua has a degree in finance, so she went to university and was able to communicate with others. She has done many internships where she has been able to develop skills. She is motivated and has proved that she can adapt to different contexts



There is no problem with the performance of the line. Disability is a way of seeing things. We see the happiness and joy that Jamel, who has learning difficulties, has brought to the company.

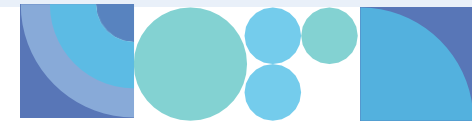
- Discrimination based on health status

Discrimination on the basis of on health status is expressly prohibited. You are not allowed to prejudice a person's capacity based on their health status. It is up to occupational medicine to assess whether the person is



When I was 1.5 years old, my mother noticed that I could not see things.

The doctor diagnosed a pigmentary retina problem and told my mother that I had a serious condition and that I would be blind by the age of 13.



professionals and work with other colleagues

### Solutions for recruiters

Chat with Maroua via text message. Ask her how she communicates.

Depending on what she prefers, offer her a face-to-face meeting or a conversation via instant messaging.

Happiness and joy are contagious. Disability is not at all!

Testimony of Radouan Kelfaoui, Mercen company, Tunisia



fit or unfit for a job.

The workplace doctor's capacity to do so hinges on his or her understanding of the interactive social model of disability, beyond the medical model.

He said that I would never be a surgeon or a pilot. Today, I am a senior engineer and blind. My professional success has not been hindered by my medical condition because I did not let the doctors discourage me.

Testimonial





A 400g TIN OF  
STEAMED PEAS  
BY  
"DELIGREENS"

IT'S HIM  
THAT I  
WANT IN  
MY AISLE!

This factsheet is part of a kit of eight factsheets designed for businesses and services supporting people with disabilities into employment.