



## Purpose

To make people aware of how we are often categorizing each other unconsciously and based on stereotypes, and to create a space of reflection.

## You need

- Photos of people from different backgrounds:
  - It is important that you know their background and history (see also examples attached).
  - It would be an advantage if you can find photos of people who challenges the usual popular stereotypes.
  - It would be an advantage if the photos are all similar in style, so the style does not distract peoples impressions
- Small cards of cardboard or paper, which can be sorted (you can also cut A4 papers in 8 - 16 pieces)
- Markers or pens that are clearly visible in their writing

## Steps

Put all the photos on a wall, so they are clearly visible, and so everybody can get close to get a good view.

Distribute the cards and the pens among the participants, and ask the participants to write down all the impressions, thoughts and associations they get when looking at the people at the photos.

Ask the participants to write down the very first thoughts they get, when looking at the photos, and ask them not to try and filter or interpret their associations with self-censorship.

Try make it a bit humanistic by telling the participants that they are allowed to be political incorrect, and that they will not be held responsible. You can tell them that the whole setup is made, so they do not have to reveal who wrote what, because all the cards will be mixed after.

Everything will thus happen in a more or less anonymous way (unless the participants can recognize each others writing ;-))

Important notes:

- The participants must not indicate which photo they are referring to, when writing their thoughts on the cards.
- The participants must only write one impression/thought/association on each card. If they have more, they should use a new card for each impression/thought/association.
- A participant can fill as many cards as she/he wishes to.
- Do not speak together during the exercise, it is purely individual.

You can also recommend people to write in short sentences or without long descriptions. You can choose to joke that everybody will have to read everything afterwards, so it can be a good idea for the participants to economize with the words, to save themselves for a lot of reading afterwards ;-).

When everybody have been finishing writing on the cards and have nothing more to add, ask them to put all their cards on the floor, in a way so everybody can see all the cards, and read what has been written.

Then the next step of the exercise starts. The cards need to be sorted, which can be done through use of the method Democracy of the Ground, or Sosotec - Self Organising Systems on the edge of Chaos (freely interpreted from Robert Chambers):

Ask the participants to remove the photos from the wall, and distribute them on the floor among the cards, making sure there are plenty of space between each photo.

The task is now that the participants sort the cards, so they fit with the photos. Everybody can now take part.

The following rules must be followed:

- Nobody can talk or use sign language or other ways of communicating during the exercise
- You can move all the cards on the floor, no matter who wrote it.
- Everybody are allowed to take part, using the principle: If you want influence on the result, you will have to take part.
- every participant has the right to categorize the cards as she or he wishes:
  - If you believe a card belongs with a certain photo, you are always free to move it there, no matter how other participants have decided. If you disagree with another participants decision to associate a card with a photo, you are always free to move a given card to another photo.

Give the participants some time to finish the task. Give them the timothy need. It will usually not take a long time.

When you can sense that the cards have found their final place, and things calm down, then agree with the participants that you assume that there is a consensus about the final categorization (usually this leads to some more moving around, when people get a little more courage to make their point, but this also calms down again, and then you can again state that you assume this is the final decision).

Let the participants understand that everybody has had the opportunity of influencing the outcome of this exercise.

Now, together with the participants, go through what has been written about each of the photos, and reveal the details about who the photo is showing, and what you can tell about each. Usually there is a big contrast between the impressions and the actual profile.

## **Reflection**

Together with the participants, reflect on what they think of the impressions and the real profiles, and how the differences can be interpreted. Discuss what this tells about first impressions and associations, and how it affects how we judge other people and how this affects our behaviour, respect and acceptance.

## **Background reflections**

Quick judgements and stereotypes are a part of the way we behave and navigate ashman beings.

We have all a tendency to build 'world models' of the reality that we use in navigating through the reality.

These world models is build based on generalisations from our previous first-hand experiences, or second-hand what others have told and shown us, either on a personal level, through established understandings in our community or through media, to mention some.

An explanation of this tendency could be that reality is full of complexities, and that it would be very hard to make even the smallest decisions and choices, if we always had to consider all possible scenarios and implications of a given choice. This tendency to build simplified world models is therefore often an effective way to make it easier to navigate.

However a model is never the same as the reality itself, and is per definition a simplification, and sometimes it is also directly wrong.

Both in psychology and in science philosophy there are concepts of distinctions between how we acquire knowledge.

In psychology Jean Piaget suggested two different kinds of learning, *accommodation* and *assimilation*.

Assimilation is described as the process of 'fitting' new knowledge into an already existing model of knowledge, while accommodation is more substantial, describing when new knowledge is forcing the individual to redefine her/his model of knowledge, so it can include the new knowledge.

Similarly in Science theory, Thomas Kuhn operated with the concepts of *scientific paradigms*, which is an attempt to describe how scientific theories develops. From Kuhn's perspective a new scientific paradigm is described as a sort scientific revolution, where some theory or discovery is turning existing scientific theories upside down, and thus promoting a new way of thinking and perceiving the world. An example of such revolution was Einsteins relativity theory, which suggested a radical new way of seeing the world.

The scientific revolutions are not the most common way of operating in science, but rather the periods of what Kuhn called *normal science*. During these periods new empirical data are assimilated into the prevailing paradigm, and sought to be aligned within the corresponding world model, until the deviation or conflict with the paradigms is so big that a new paradigm will be required.

Both theories are similar in their suggestion of how we learn about or discover the world around us, and on how we use models of the world to predict outcomes and consequences. And both can also offer a suggestion of how to understand our use of stereotypes and world models in our everyday life. Where our normal behaviour would be to use our own internal standard world model of how the world (including people around us) behave and functions, and where sometimes a more profound realisation is needed in order to evaluate and revise this model, because it is simply based on wrong assumptions.

**Suggested images:**

Feel free to add more :-)



**Chokri Belaid**

Tunisian lawyer, poet and politician. Former leader of the secular left-wing party Mouvement des patriotes démocrates, and one of the front figures in the left-wing movement of Tunisia.

He was openly critical of the Ben Ali Regime and later the islamist government under Ennahda.

He was also critical of the salafist movement and were a proponent of the normalization of the relations to Israel.

He was assassinated outside his house and the investigation never led to any clear conclusion.



**Adriaan Vlok**

South African politician and minister of Law and Order during the apartheid regime.

The State Security Council of which Vlok was a member – planned and implemented drastic repressive measures, including hit squads, carrying out bombings and assassination of anti-apartheid activists.

Vlok was granted amnesty by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – the sole cabinet minister to have admitted committing crimes. Later Vlok came forward with public apologies for a number of acts that he had not disclosed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and for which he could therefore be prosecuted.



**Waleed Abu al-Khair**

Saudi-Arabian lawyer and human rights defender.

Has been representing man political activists and victims of human rights violations in the country.

Is also leader og the organisation Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia.

He is the first activist who has been prosecuted with reference to the terrorism law, and was sentenced 15 years of prison in 2014.



**Alisher Karamatov**

One of two human rights defenders from Uzbekistan who was imprisoned and tortured after he had been defending the rights of local farmers. They had been subjected to corruption and blackmailing by local authority figures. He has been recognized as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.



### **Beate Zschäpe**

German right-wing extremist and an alleged member of the Neo-Nazi terror group National Socialist Underground. She was accused of having taken part in the murders of eight fellow citizens of Turkish origin and one fellow citizen of Greek origin, in the murderous attack on two police officers in Heilbronn, as well as in the attempted murders by bomb attacks of the NSU in the historic district of Cologne and in Cologne-Müllheim.



### **Roger Jean Claude Mbede**

Citizen of Cameroun and recognized by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. He was sentenced for homosexuality and imprisoned for three years. During the prison time he was subjected to humiliation, violence and sexual violations. He was later released because of health concerns but died later because he couldn't afford hospitalization and medicine.



### **Jalila al-Salman**

Citizen of Bahrain and recognized by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. She is a member of Bahrain's teacher organization and was imprisoned and tortured after the organization had been warning about strikes following protests against the regime in 2011. There are no indications that she had ever been advocating for violence.



### **Maryam Mirzakhani**

Iranian mathematician, and since 2006 professor at Stanford University in USA. She was the first Iranian to receive the prestigious Fields Medal, which can be described as the Nobel Prize of mathematics.



### **Gabor Vona**

Hungarian politician and the leader of the Hungarian nationalist political party Jobbik. In June 2007, Vona founded the radical nationalist Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard). The organization was disbanded by the Metropolitan Court of Budapest (Fővárosi Bíróság) on the grounds that the activities of the organization "were against the human rights of minorities as guaranteed by the Hungarian Constitution".



### **Michael Kimindu**

Kenyan Citizen and former Anglican priest and now president of Other Sheep-Africa, a gay rights organization. He was ejected from his church after it became known that he welcomed homosexuals in his church. The church furthermore warned other priests that they would also be ejected if they followed his example or even did a prayer together with him.



### **Theodore Kaczynski**

Is also known as the "Unabomber", is an American mathematician, former professor at Berkeley University, USA, anarchist and serial killer. He engaged in a nationwide bombing campaign against people involved with modern technology, planting or mailing numerous homemade bombs, ultimately killing a total of three people and injuring 23 others. He is also known for his wide-ranging social critiques, which opposed industrialization and modern technology while advancing a nature-centered form of anarchism.