

## 5.2 Your perspective matters

Step 5. Reflect      Time: 30 min      Individual exercise

### Summary

Our background and our experiences play a major role in what we see as “true” and “normal” - even for what we see at all. Our perspective on life colors our entire thinking and greatly influences what we see as valuable and how we judge others and ourselves. It is easy to accept in theory that there are other perspectives than your own, but how affected are we really?

### What to do:

- Read the text and watch the clip below.
- Tip! Previous exercises in the Respect Ladder that specifically link to the same topic as this exercise are "Step 1 - Think! Prejudices and Labels and "Step 4 Experience - Who Are We Listening To?".

## Exercise

### Discovering different perspectives and their importance

Our background and our experiences play a major role in what we see as “true” and “normal” - even for what we see at all. Our perspective on life colors our entire thinking and greatly influences what we see as valuable and how we judge others and ourselves. That is why it is at least as important to see what your own perspective is as to understand that there are other perspectives that are as relevant as your own. It is easy to accept in theory that there are other perspectives than your own, but how affected are we really? In this exercise we will explore various perspectives through some different examples.

Start by watching the film clip below where Fredrik Härén puts into perspective our view of knowledge and how it is often valued.

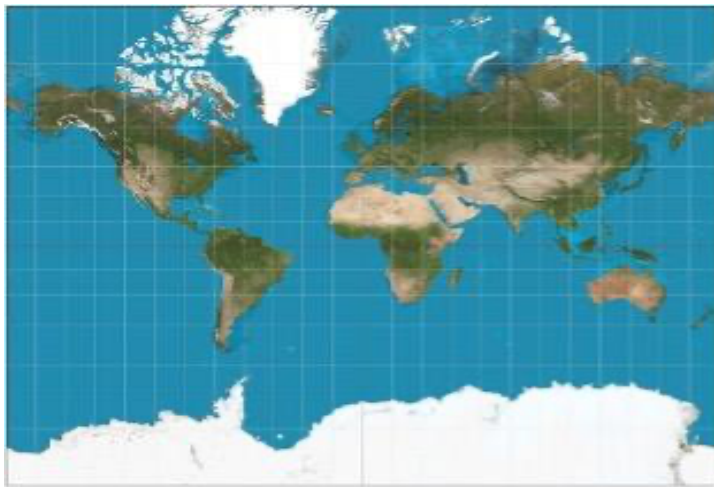
Film clip: [Knowledge](#) (11.30 minutes, in Swedish)

Make small reflections on:

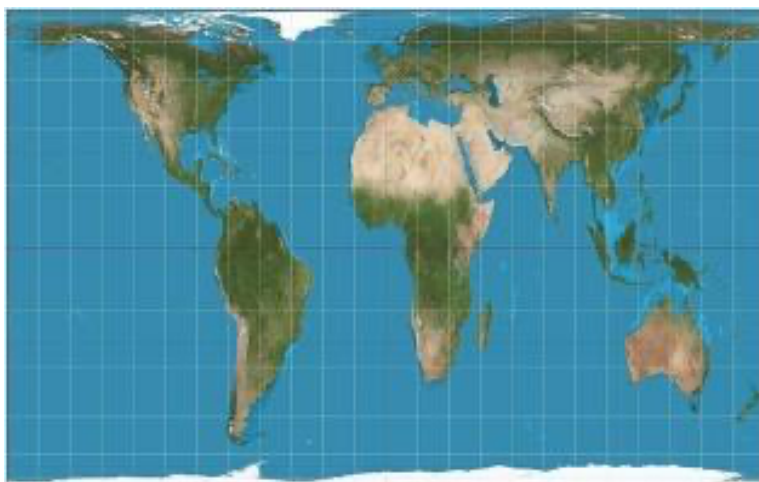
- What thoughts does the film give you?
- What consequences does what is taken up have at a societal level? In our organization? For you as an individual?

# MAKE EQUAL

**More about perspective!** More about perspective! Think of the world in the form of a map. We are used to seeing Europe highest up and in the middle of the map, aren't we? But is that picture the only correct one? It is used the whole world over wherever you live, but drawing a map of the world is in itself impossible. You are faced with a lot of choices when trying to do it. One problem is, quite simply, how to get something round to fit on a flat surface. The difficulty can be shown by peeling an orange and trying to put the peel on a flat A4 sheet of paper. You have to use something called a "projection" to produce a map of the world. There are an infinite number of ways of projecting, but the most common is the so-called Mercator projection which dates from the 16th century.



Like all projections it has its strengths and weaknesses. The biggest problem is that the northern hemisphere, and particularly Europe, is strongly oversized in relation to other parts of the world. If proportions were made more realistic, the map would instead look like the one below.



The size distortion becomes even clearer if we place China, India and the United States on the African continent.



Mercator was from Holland and (perhaps for that reason) unsurprisingly placed Europe in the middle of the map. If someone does it differently, e.g. places Australia in the centre, it is as a rule difficult for us to even see that we are looking at a map of the world. For example, how do you feel about the image on the right? What is it that you see?



Maps of the world are just one way of highlighting how our perspectives and our presuppositions matter. We are not neutral and we make plenty of assumptions - often unknowingly - that lead us to believe and think as we do. What do you think the consequences of this perspective, of how we are used to looking at the world, are? Does it affect how we look at, value and judge people differently?

## There is only one truth - isn't there?

Another way to make a similar point is to look at the images below, which you have no doubt seen before. What do you see? If there are several of you, you will certainly see different things and the same person can see varying things at different times. What thoughts does this phenomenon give you? Can you draw any parallels to how this can be of importance in the area of biases and respect?



## Different views of knowledge and competence

Knowledge and competence are areas we often talk about. Not least in the context of work, but also in other parts of life. High levels of knowledge and skills are valued throughout the world, but our perspectives clearly influence what we see as competence and who we see as having it. In recruitment and in the context of performance and efficiency, our views on this play a very central part. Who is considered to have the necessary qualifications for a position, for a pay rise, to give valuable feedback or to be given a place on the new project? Competence is often treated as an objective category that is easy to measure. But is it really so objective and simple?

Sima Wolgast's thesis "How does the job applicants' ethnicity affect the selection process? Norms, preferred competencies and expected fit" show that employers' questions to job seekers differ in relation to the applicants' ethnicity and color. This applies even when structured recruitment processes are followed. In one part of the study some 50 recruiters had to formulate questions for job seekers with either Swedish or Arabic-sounding names. It was found that the questions to those with Arabic-sounding names focused on things other than professional competence. Another group of recruiters then had to decide which information is best suited for recruitment. The answer was, not unexpectedly, that it was precisely that on professional competence. That is to say, the information that was not the focus of the interviews of Arab applicants. The study showed that when those of us with Arabic-sounding names are interviewed, the recruiter tends to favor interview questions that concern social competence, values and the interviewee's ability to work together with others. For example: what is your attitude to our cultural values, Swedish values, moral positions? For those of us with Swedish-sounding names, the recruiter instead prefers

questions of the type: How do you work under stress and how do you resolve conflicts? That is to say, more job-related questions.

You may want to listen to [Ekot](#) (Swedish news radio), where Sima comments on her study (1:13 min, in Swedish)

Link to thesis: [http://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/how-does-the-job-applicants-ethnicity-affect-the-selection-process\(fb178400-8bd4-4765-8199-7a3b912607df\).html](http://portal.research.lu.se/portal/en/publications/how-does-the-job-applicants-ethnicity-affect-the-selection-process(fb178400-8bd4-4765-8199-7a3b912607df).html)

Link to an article on the thesis (in Swedish): <https://www.arbetsvarlden.se/ledare/nya-studien-avslojar-an-mer-utbredd-diskriminering/>

Our view of knowledge and competence is highly influenced by unconscious biases and norms linked to our perspectives. This has consequences not just for the individual. The neuroscientist Vivienne Ming uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to examine how our biases influence us and what the cost of this can be.

**Watch the film clip: [Tax on being different](#) (6:41 minutes, in English)**

- What do you think of the film clip you just saw?
- Can you remember if/when you were surprised (positively or negatively) by a person's competence? Why were you surprised?
- Can you think of an occasion when you felt that your competence was valued higher/lower based on your group membership rather than anything else?
- What are your thoughts on biases about group membership and competence after having done the exercise? Do you have any? What are they?