

Unconscious Bias: a guide

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1. What is Unconscious Bias?

- Unconscious or Implicit Bias is a positive or negative mental attitude towards a person, thing or group that is held at an unconscious level. We all hold biases, some of which we may be conscious of as well as others which operate outside of our awareness.
- We don't have unconscious biases because we are bad people – we have them because we are people. They are created and reinforced through our upbringing and background, personal experiences and the media we are exposed to.
- They can be harmful in the workplace as we might unconsciously make judgements which can impact the building of good working relationships, informal and formal support people receive at work, opportunities for career progression and promotion, and making others feeling valued and welcome.
- Being unaware of our biases does not excuse discrimination. We need to be accountable for our own unconscious bias, taking responsibility to identify patterns of behaviour and putting strategies in place to address these. These strategies will also support us in tackling conscious bias and structural bias, which must also be dismantled.
- The following [video](#) gives more insight into Unconscious Bias.

Types of Unconscious Bias

Halo Effect: One positive trait or instance, influencing your judgements and opinions positively which results in disregarding negative traits or instances.

Horns Effect: The opposite of the halo effect. One negative trait or instance, influencing your judgements and opinions negatively which results in disregarding positive traits or instances.

Confirmation Bias: Favouring or choosing information which fits in with one's pre-existing beliefs.

Affinity Bias: Also known as the similarity bias. People want to connect with others who share similar backgrounds, experiences and interests.

Conformity Bias: Conforming with other members in a group, even if it contradicts your own opinion or judgement.

Anchoring Bias: Relying too heavily on one trait or a piece of information. (Does not need a positive or negative focus)

Gender bias: The tendency to prefer one gender over others.

Name bias: A preference for someone based on their name, which positively reflects on your decision making and judgements.

What is the impact?

Bias in recruitment, promotion, development and everyday workplace interaction creates inequality, limits the potential value that can flow from a diverse workforce, and threatens employee engagement, commitment and productivity.

Recruitment and promotion of staff from a limited pool

A lack of diversity in the workplace -particularly at senior levels

Underrepresented groups feel alienated, unwelcome and unsupported

Less productivity
Less resilience
Less innovation

Addressing unconscious bias ensures that people feel welcome and valued and are given encouragement and are given access to formal and informal opportunities for progression and promotion opportunities.

What can you do?

Acknowledge your bias	<p>By acknowledging our bias we can learn to look for it in ourselves and help others who work with us to do the same. A place to start considering personal bias could be the Harvard Implicit Association Test.</p>	Voice concerns and call out bias	<p>Create a work culture where challenging inappropriate behaviour is everyone's responsibility.</p> <p>We have developed an online learning resource, Be an UpStander which provides information, tools and techniques to encourage staff to challenge all forms of unacceptable behaviour including microaggressions - Microaggressions Guide.</p> <p>Advice and support about how to manage and report any unacceptable behaviour experienced or seen in the workplace, including unconscious bias, can be found on the Stand Up, Speak Out web page.</p>
Conscious Questioning	<p>Challenge your own assumptions and bias with active self-questioning. This helps you think beyond your preferences, consider a broader picture and develop an evidence-based approach to decision-making. Some useful prompts or questions to highlight possible bias include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does this person remind you of yourself?• Does this person remind you of anyone else?• Is this positive or negative?• Are the things that influence your impression relevant to the situation?	Analyse diversity data	<p>Robust monitoring processes such as recruitment data, data on progression and qualitative feedback, can enable an organisation to understand its biases and the impact.</p>
Time	<p>Time pressure can cause us to make biased responses. To manage bias slow down your responses to create space between automatic reflexes, especially in recruitment and mentoring processes.</p> <p>Delay your response to consciously question your choices using the prompts above. Controlled processing requires more mental energy, so avoid making key decisions when you are distracted.</p>	Take the perspective of others	<p>Perspective taking prompts us to consider the thoughts, feelings and viewpoints of others; improving relations by increasing empathy and decreasing negative stereotypes.</p> <p>We often make errors in judgement when we attribute a person's behaviour/actions to assumed intrinsic qualities rather than considering their cultural frame of reference. By taking others' perspectives, developing better Cultural Intelligence and understanding that cultural identity affects people's experiences, we can interpret individuals more accurately and reduce the tendency towards stereotyping and bias.</p> <p>Schemes such as mentoring and reciprocal mentoring programmes are beneficial in supporting this.</p>
Individuals, not groups	<p>People are less inclined to resort to stereotypes when they engage with counter-stereotypical imagery.</p> <p>Acknowledging and celebrating the successes of individuals from underrepresented groups can weaken stereotypical associations between groups and focussing on individuals further dismantles bias.</p>	Expand your network	<p>Forming diverse working relationships and networks, and seeking out diverse voices in decision making, helps to dismantle social categorisation, reduce stereotypes and decrease bias.</p>

A

Acknowledge
your bias

C

Conscious
questioning

T

Time

I

Individuals
not groups

V

Voice
concerns

A

Analyse
diversity data

T

Take the
perspective of others

E

Expand your
network

Useful resources:

[Staff Inclusion webpages](#)

[Disrupting Racism Programme For staff and other learning and development opportunities](#)

[Diversify web page](#)

Microaggressions Guide

[Harvard Implicit Bias test](#)

[Unconscious Bias at Shortlisting and Interview](#)

[Successful Recruitment and Selection](#)

[Equality Impact tool](#)

We have used and adapted content from the following sources:

[Three ways to make less biased decisions, Harvard Business Review, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Why subtle bias is so often worse than blatant discrimination, Harvard Business Review, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Six proven strategies for managing unconscious bias, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Unconscious bias activities, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Reduce unconscious bias at work, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Improve your cultural intelligence strategy: perspective taking, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[What you can do to spot and stop unconscious bias, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Culture, values and the impact at work, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Unconscious bias, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Pragya Agarwal 'People use unconscious bias as a get out clause', retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Implicit bias, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[Implicit bias – concepts unwrapped, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

[How to tackle bias, retrieved Sept 2020](#)

If you have any questions or would like this guide in an alternative format please contact diversity-inclusion@bristol.ac.uk

