

# Unconscious Bias



## Handout



## Learning Log

<b>Section of Session</b>	<b>Key Learning Point</b>

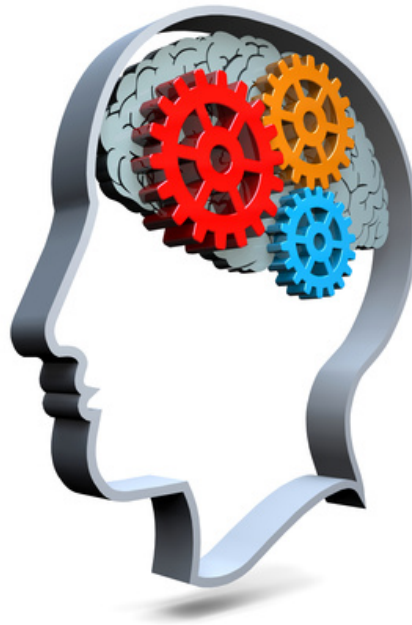
## Action Plan

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>When by?</b>



We all form categories which pre-judge others, and other groups, based on past experiences with a similar group. This pre-judging will also be based on what we have seen, heard and absorbed unconsciously during the course of our lives. Influences can come from family and friends but may also be affected by the News, social media and peers; creating patterns which we unconsciously process and store. These categories get reinforced by our daily lives, without us thinking consciously about them.

These unconscious decisions we make about someone's character will then help create a bias, whether good or bad, towards them. Unconscious bias cannot be stopped, but we can learn how to use logical thought to ensure that we don't let it impact negatively in the workplace.



## Know your own Bias

We all like to think that we fully understand any prejudices that we have, and most people will try and combat them. Because unconscious bias operates on such a subconscious level, we are unlikely to even recognise that it is happening. Most people will have had a situation where, upon meeting someone new, they immediately feel they won't like them. This is a perfectly normal reaction, even if it isn't one that we feel very comfortable to deal with.



The best way we can try and limit the influence of unconscious bias is to understand what our inbuilt biases may be. But, how do you understand something so sub-conscious?

In 1998, scientists from three of America's largest Universities launched Project Implicit. The project was set up by Tony Greenwald (University of Washington), Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University), and Brian Nosek (University of Virginia). They designed an online Implicit Association Test, or IAT, to try to investigate deeper into people's subconscious biases. Their website states:

“Project Implicit is a non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control. The goal of the organization is to educate the public about hidden biases and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the Internet.”

“The IAT was originally developed as a device for exploring the unconscious roots of thinking and feeling. This web site has been constructed for a different purpose -- to offer the IAT to interested individuals as a tool to gain greater awareness about their own unconscious preferences and beliefs.”

The Project Implicit website provides access to a range of free IAT’s which can be completed.

You can find out more about the project by following this link:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/uk/background/index.jsp>

To take one or more of the IAT tests, follow this link:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/uk/takeatest.html>

The tests take about 10 minutes and can help all employees investigate what their unconscious biases are.

Once it is clear where your biases may lay, you can be much more conscious of working to counteract them.



How does unconscious bias affect your organisation?

Over the last few years, there have been increasing amounts of research done to examine how a lack of diversity can affect an organisation. Where unconscious bias is left unchecked, there is an obvious danger that minority groups will not be hired, or heard.

## Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity is about difference. Essentially, a valuing diversity approach focuses on the positive aspects of the differences between people. It recognises that the different backgrounds, values, attitudes, skills and experiences that people have mean that they bring a unique perspective to work issues.

Many organisations are adopting a diversity approach – e.g. the Moral Case, the Business Case and the Legal Case.

### The Moral Case

There is a moral duty for organisations to provide an environment where individuals are treated with dignity and respect, and which offers opportunity to all staff. This duty is shared by everyone within the organisation, though Senior Managers clearly must take a lead in shaping the culture of the organisation.

### The Business Case

In purely financial terms there are good reasons why any organisation should embrace a diversity approach – for example:

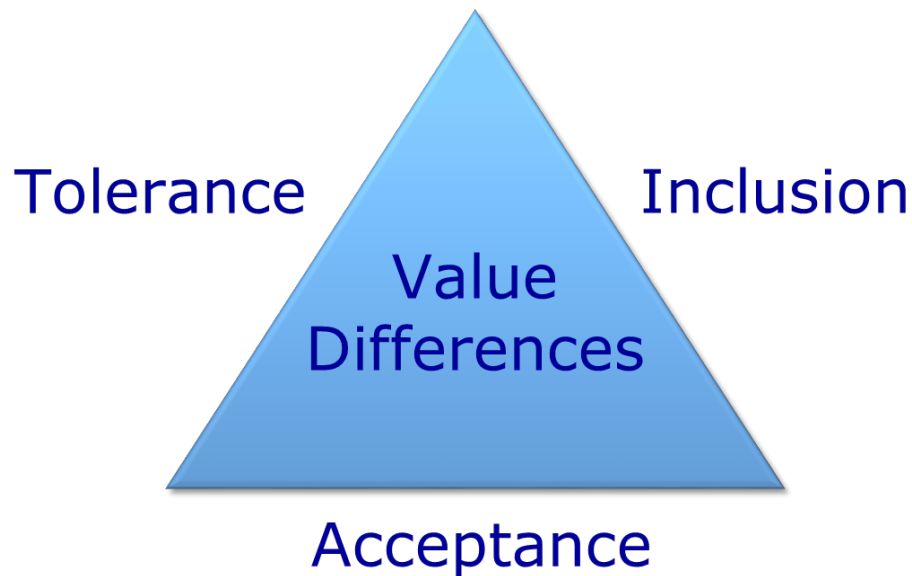
- Staff turnover is often reduced in organisations which value diversity, so recruitment and training costs are reduced.
- Flexible working arrangements allow staff to cope effectively with changing personal circumstances without having to leave their employment. This ensures that experienced staff are retained, again saving recruitment and training costs.
- Employers who value diversity will recruit from wider sections of the community and therefore have a greater chance of employing the best people.
- Organisations which embrace diversity have a more diverse workforce and so can appeal to a more diverse base of customers.

## The Legal Case

Legislation is continually evolving in response to new cases and employers are bound both by UK legislation and European Council Directives. This legislation covers discrimination, and increasingly, bullying and harassment.

Organisations that fail to implement policies and procedures, which value diversity, are more likely to be subject to legal action resulting in compensation payments to victims.

Any business that fails to create a diverse workforce is putting itself at a disadvantage. New ideas are not heard, new markets are not explored, and businesses do not grow as they could. All organisations need to move forward, to adapt to changing market places, and a broad spectrum of input and ideas can only help. Innovation often equals growth.



This is an example of a simple model, that if followed will allow you to adopt a well-balanced diverse approach in the workplace.



## Diversity Definition:

*"The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met."*

**(Kandola and Fullerton 1994)**

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## Reducing Organisational Bias

A number of things can be done at a personal level to enable us all to recognise, monitor, and reduce the impact of our personal biases, taking an IAT test should be the first step towards your own self-awareness. Organisations must also support this within their policies and practices for future and existing employees.

### Organisational values

Consider your Organisational Values or Mission Statement; do they encourage diversity and Inclusion? Do you need to revisit these?

This is the starting point and will help reinforce positive bias behaviours and thought processes.

### Remove negative barriers

To assist with the eradication of bias, you can look at how to combat negative images which may create and reinforce negative associations. Making simple

declarations about valuing a diverse workforce has an impact, as can making it clear that the procedures and employees have undergone bias testing.

Making sure that you allocate sufficient time to carefully consider all evidence provided will help to reduce the impact of unconscious biases within processes. Over-stretching your employees, in terms of the amount of information they have to process in a short space of time, is proven to create the ideal conditions for unconscious bias to operate.

### Selecting new employees

Even having what you may consider irrelevant information during selection can trigger our unconscious biases. Where possible sifting and other assessment should take place without assessors knowing anything which could unintentionally induce bias. For example, having candidate names on application forms alongside the information being used for sifting candidates will often tell an assessor key information about the person like their:

- gender
- possible ethnic origin

These items can trigger unconscious biases without us realising it. Where possible paper or online applications for jobs or a promotion should be sifted using reference numbers instead of a name. Even information like their interests, schools etc. can have an impact on our presumption and bias of individuals.

### Take your time

Bias becomes most prevalent when we are forced into making a quick decision or judgement. Rushing decisions forces us to fall back on our subconscious, which we've already established, can be biased. Taking the time to stop and think critically about any decision you have to make will help to ensure you don't slip into biased thinking. This may of course mean that you take longer to make decisions, but it will help to ensure you are being fair, which makes it worth the commitment.

### Create the right environment for employees

Employees may believe that they already make fair decisions and may be resistant to having to take the time to focus on their biases. Training them in unconscious bias and explaining why change to any processes is necessary will help reduce this resistance. Organisational procedures must be robust and fair to ensure unconscious bias can be removed.

### Challenge bias when it occurs

Where you feel that someone may be making a decision based on a bias, it is useful to politely challenge their thinking. This could be done by asking a colleague how they came to their decision and what relevance a specific piece of information might make to that conclusion. Where a piece of information has no relevance to the situation, politely suggest it is excluded and then review what effect this has on the decision. It's important to try and cultivate an environment of challenging bias in the workplace.

### Listen to the language being used

Whether it be in documents or when made verbally, the language that we use can highlight unconscious bias. It's worth checking organisational documents to assess the language for partiality. Is there a male bias in the language? Does the tone of a job advert suggest that someone older or younger is preferred? Similarly, we should keep check of the language people use in the workplace and try to ensure it is neutral. Of course we shouldn't get carried away with this process and it's important to ensure things don't become too ambiguous and confusing. This can cause resentment and sometimes have an adverse effect.

### Show empathy

In difficult situations, our bias can push through any empathy we may feel for a person. If we deem their behaviour unacceptable it can cloud our judgement and mean that we react rather than respond. Putting ourselves in their shoes and thinking about things from their perspective can help to keep our bias in check and helps to ensure our response is made from a position of fairness.

By following or implementing some of these practices, you and your organisation will be taking some positive steps to reduce or eliminate Unconscious Bias within the workplace.

## Summary

We now know that we all form categories which pre-judge others, and other groups, based on past experiences, whether we like it or not. This pre-judging will also be based on what we have seen, heard and absorbed unconsciously during the course of our lives. These categories get reinforced by our daily lives, without us thinking about them consciously.

These unconscious decisions we make about someone's character will then help create a bias, whether good or bad, towards them. Unconscious bias cannot be stopped, but we can learn how to use logical thought to ensure that we don't let it impact negatively in the workplace.

To help manage your biases ensure that you:

- Accept that YOU, and everyone else have biases
- Arrange testing so that you and others are aware of the type and strength of their unconscious biases
- Be honest about your biases; try not to simply choose your more socially acceptable biases to discuss and address
- Raise awareness of unconscious bias within the organisation, it's impact and what can be done to manage or counter it
- Put in place processes and policies within the organisation that are fair and inclusive to all

By following these steps you will give yourself and the organisation the best chance of managing Unconscious Bias within the workplace.