

THE QUICK GUIDE TO UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

OVERVIEW

We all experience implicit and explicit biases in our workplace on a day-to-day basis. These biases operate within our thoughts and behaviors, enabling quick decision-making. However, they also hold the potential to influence our perception of others, thereby making recruitment and other critical business judgments biased.

Unconscious Bias has a way of negatively impacting workplace culture, restricting job opportunities, and hindering productive team dynamics. These events can lead to a series of challenges between teams and employees. This is why addressing unconscious bias is essential in the workplace to foster a hostile environment.

WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

Unconscious Bias, also known as implicit bias, are the subconscious attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that individuals hold about certain groups of people/thing. They can impact decision-making, behavior, and perceptions, even when individuals are unaware of their existence. These biases are often unintentional, happen unknowingly, and are influenced by societal conditioning, experiences, and deep-rooted cultural influences.

In this comprehensive guide, we'll dive into the details of unconscious bias, explore its various forms, highlight the advantages of its eradication, and provide practical insights on how to mitigate bias across diverse workplace scenarios.

TYPES OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The Halo Effect –

The halo effect is based on our impressions of others. It is when you allow one positive trait of an individual to influence your reasoning and their other personality attributes are overshadowed because of that. It can lead to unrealistic expectations and misjudgments of colleagues.

For example: If we think an individual is intelligent, we are more likely and convinced to believe that they are competent and successful.

The Horns Effect –

The horns effect is the exact opposite of the halo effect. It is a scenario where you just focus on an individual's negative feature. However, that one negative aspect doesn't define that person as a whole. It is crucial to learn more about that person and not form an opinion just based on the presumptions.

For example: An employee's recent minor mistake led the manager to doubt his ability in various tasks, despite his strong track record and good work on other projects.

The Contrast Effect –

The contrast effect is a cognitive bias in which our perception and judgment of something is influenced by comparing it to something else, rather than assessing it individually. This could lead us to perceive or view the differences in a slightly altered way.

For example: A previously valued employee's performance may appear less impressive when compared to the high achievers who recently joined the team.

Affinity Bias –

Also known as similarity bias, is a natural inclination towards individuals who share similarities with us in a certain way. It could be race, gender, background, experiences, beliefs or even shared hobbies along with multiple other factors. This unconscious bias can lead us to favor certain people over the most qualified ones.

For example: A manager gives preferential treatment to an employee because they share the same school, unknowingly overlooking the other team members and their potential.

Attribution Bias –

Attribution bias is the tendency where we attribute an individual's behaviour to their personal character and traits rather than external factors or situations. However, when it comes to their own actions or behaviours, people often attribute it to factors beyond their control.

For example: When an individual arrives late for work, they may attribute it to traffic. However, if a colleague is late, they might label or blame them as "lazy" or someone with "poor time management skills".

Confirmation Bias –

Confirmation bias is when an individual is inclined to seek, interpret, and remember information in a way that validates their existing beliefs and disregards the information that contradicts them. It's when someone starts forming an opinion about something, they should pause and consider the evidence that supports it.

For example - A team member dismisses a colleague's ideas during a brainstorming session without fully considering them because they already have a preconceived notion that the colleague's ideas are not innovative.

Conformity Bias –

Conformity bias is a tendency where individuals adopt the beliefs, opinions, or behaviors of a larger group, often at the expense of their own independent thinking and opinions. It stems from the idea of "fitting in" and seeking social acceptance to avoid standing out or conflicting with the majority.

For example: Your team is planning an after-office party they are excited about. The last time they went, they talked about it for weeks, and you felt excluded because you didn't join. Although you are not keen, you decide to join them this time to avoid feeling left out.

STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE BIAS

- **Incorporate training programs** – Every organization should invest in employee [training and education](#) to raise awareness, encourage self-reflection, and foster an environment of inclusion. Unconscious bias training can help identify the stereotypes that employees/employers may or may not believe they have. Use real-world corporate scenarios to illustrate the impact of bias and how to overcome it.
- **Acknowledge your biases** – Biases are natural and a part of being human, but a lot of times we are unconscious of their existence. A valuable initial step in addressing biases is self-identification and acknowledgment. This empowers you to hold yourself accountable for your prejudices and actions, encouraging fair decision-making.
- **Avoid rushed decision-making** – Taking the time to make informed and well-thought decisions is essential in addressing unconscious bias. It is advisable to gather diverse perspectives and viewpoints from multiple sources to counter the impact of your bias. Allocate sufficient time to gather and analyze relevant information.
- **Promote bias-free processes and strategies** – This involves a systematic approach to identify and eliminate biases within all aspects of an organization's operations such as recruitment, performance evaluations, decision-making, and resource allocation. Businesses should look into conducting bias audits, data analysis, and regular checks to ensure fairness.

BENEFITS OF ELIMINATING BIAS

- In a workplace where employees are celebrated for their unique perspectives and encouraged for diverse experiences, **creativity and innovation** thrive.
- Without the distortion of bias, all employees are viewed through the same lens, thereby making **rational decisions**, leading to better choices for both an individual and the organization.
- A fair and inclusive work environment leads to happiness and belonging at work, thereby boosting employee morale, overall satisfaction, and **employee retention**.
- Fostering a bias-free or diverse work culture attracts a **diverse range of talent**, tapping into a broad range of skills and experiences.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND THE BOTTOM LINE

In addition to creating an inclusive and equitable workplace, it has been proven that providing Unconscious Bias training and raising awareness can help employees shape their behavior and become more open to diverse viewpoints. This in turn improves employee engagement and would reap tangible benefits for the company such as increased revenue and turnover rates. This can also help prevent business risks, lawsuits, and negative PR resulting from DEI incidents.

Offering constant education on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) aspects is crucial to maintain a diverse company culture and take your business results to the next level with better team performance.