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Inclusive Recruitment

This workbook will give you the information and advice you need to make sure your recruitment processes are inclusive and welcoming to everyone.

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What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias, also known as implicit bias, is a learned assumption, belief, or attitude that exists in the subconscious. Every human has these biases and uses them as mental shortcuts for faster processing of information and decision-making.

Implicit biases are developed over time as we accumulate life experiences and get exposed to different stereotypes, and they can have a big influence on our beliefs and behaviours.

When this translates to our professional lives, it can affect the way we hire, interact with colleagues and customers, and make business decisions. If not properly addressed, these biases can negatively impact a company's diversity, workplace culture, and team dynamics.

You can reduce the impact of unconscious bias with deliberate attention and effort. Being aware of and understanding the different types of biases that exist can help you find ways to combat them when recruiting.



Types of bias

1. Conformity Bias

Conformity bias is the bias caused by peer pressure. This is based on a famous study where a group of people were asked to look at a line in an illustration and say which line of three choices matched it in length. A volunteer was removed from the room whilst the other group members decided to give the wrong answer on purpose. On the individual's return, they were all asked which lines matched. On discovering that the rest of the group had chosen a different line to himself, the volunteer changed his mind.

2. Beauty Bias

This is the view that the most handsome/beautiful individuals will be the most successful. This is commonly used in marketing by cosmetic companies to great effect.

3. Affinity Bias

This can often happen when we like someone's personality and get on well with them. This can mean we treat them with more positivity and leniency, and even hire them regardless of whether they have the right skills.

4. Halo Effect

This is where we judge a person based on one positive thing that we know about them. For example, if someone has done a great job on one project, they may be given new and unrelated projects purely because of their past success, rather than because they have the right skills.

5. Horns Effect

This is the direct opposite of the Halo effect, where we see one thing about a person that we perceive to be 'bad' or 'negative'. For example, we might hear an accent that we don't associate with intelligence. This can cloud our opinions of their other qualities.

6. Similarity Bias

This is commonly known as the 'like us' bias. In recruiting for staff, we tend to feel more comfortable with people who have a similar social background, education, way of thinking, etc.

7. Contrast Effect

This is very common in recruitment where a recruiter will compare the CV they are reading at that moment with the CV they read immediately beforehand, rather than on its own merits.

8. Attribution Bias

When we do something well, we tend to believe we have achieved it by ourselves and with our own talents. When we have done something badly, we tend to believe this is due to external factors. However, when it comes to other people, we tend to think the opposite way round.

9. Confirmation Bias

This is when we make an initial judgement about someone, and then subconsciously look for evidence to support that assumption (while ignoring evidence that might disprove it). This is commonplace when it comes to forming stereotypes.



Real life examples of bias

This candidate sounds great!

CVs are a consistent source of unconscious bias. One particular study in the US gave a group of managers a set of CVs. Some of them were exact duplicates, where only the names had been changed.

CVs with more typically European sounding names received substantially more callbacks than those with diverse names of other origins. It was the names and their associated biases that impacted the decisions, instead of the qualifications and value they could bring to the company.

Activities were another source of assumptions. Those that sounded more prestigious, like polo or horseback riding vs. basketball or softball, skewed the perception of the candidate. Those engaged in more prestigious sounding activities were considered more refined and successful than their counterparts, simply because of their perceived financial status.

An interviewer's bias makes a substantial difference in the selection arena, and very talented applicants can be turned away for unfounded reasons.



Real life examples of bias

You remind me of someone I know.

Have you ever employed someone who reminded you of another person – perhaps the previous staff member? This can lead to a subtle but real form of implicit bias, as the feelings and opinions you associate with a person can easily influence the way you see someone who is similar to them.

Recruiting managers have a responsibility to put aside past experiences and see each person as an individual. This can be difficult at times, so recruiters should be comfortable when asking for input from others. Letting a past experience shape your current decisions is unfair to you, the potential employee, and the organisation.

Reflection activity

When have you experienced unfair or untrue assumptions being made about you?
How did that feel?

Have you ever been proven wrong about someone? What happened?



Writing job adverts

Often, diverse candidates are discouraged as soon as they read the job adverts and descriptions. These tips can help you mitigate this.

Job ads often come peppered with industry specific jargon

Acronyms and corporate buzz words can alienate potential candidates who are unfamiliar with your company's particular tone-of-voice and slang.

Instead, use straightforward language. What does the job entail on a day-to-day basis? What is your company's mission? What skills might your ideal candidate have?

State your commitment to diversity and inclusion upfront

We all face personal challenges, but some candidates will face discrimination daily. As a result, they are less likely to engage with companies that they feel will add to this discrimination. The usual paragraph that begins with "We are an equal opportunities employer" is often dropped at the end of a job ad, where it is easily missed.

Shout about your inclusive culture right at the top of the job description instead. Talk to job seekers in a human voice about the choices you have made to ensure the vacancy is open to all. Tell them about your culture and any initiatives linked to the role.

Avoid a never-ending list of responsibilities

It's understandable that hiring managers have a long list of skills they'd like for each role. But this approach can both turn off brilliant candidates and make companies look out of touch if the list of wants doesn't tally up with the benefits and support offered.

In addition, women feel they need to meet 100% of the criteria before they apply, while men usually apply after only meeting about 60%. LinkedIn behavioural data backs this up: they found that women tend to screen themselves out and end up applying to 20% fewer jobs than men.

Disabled candidates are also very unlikely to apply for jobs that they don't believe they're qualified for, and in fact, they are usually overqualified for those roles. One study found that more than half of disabled people have applied for jobs they know they are overqualified for.

Avoid subtly discriminatory language

Research shows that the language we use in job descriptions and job ads can put women off applying for jobs if it uses "masculine" language.

Words can subtly convey stereotypes, such as "compete" or "dominant" reflecting masculinity. However, words like "motivation" or "tireless" may attract more female applicants.

There are a number of gender de-coding tools that can be used to check your job descriptions and job ads for gender coding. One of these tools can be found at <http://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com/>. It also provides lists of words that can be used to achieve greater balance.

Other words, phrases, or demands can imply other traits, such as requiring that a person has their own car (socio-economic) or a particular number of years' experience (age).



Language activity

Which of the following words or phrases might not be inclusive of everyone?

- Able bodied individual
- Good communication skills
- Fluent in English
- Native English speaker
- Access to reliable transportation
- Own vehicle required
- Passionate learner
- Motivated to take on challenges
- Young and energetic
- Supplement your retirement income
- Years of experience
- Compassionate
- Graduates
- Personable with stakeholders

Reflection activity

Take a look at some of your existing job adverts. Can you spot any language that might put people off applying?



General advice

- Convert role descriptions to gender-neutral language and audit all of your job descriptions to check for any use of 'he/his/him' as default pronouns for candidates. Convert them to gender-neutral pronouns like 'they'.
- Make sure that adverts to recruit new staff are placed in as many diverse places as you can think of or have the resources to manage, e.g. community centres, faith buildings, or specific job boards.
- Organise interviews at a variety of times, including in the evening. This ensures that people who may not be able to make other times can apply.
- Cover up names and other personal information (e.g. dates and pictures) on CVs and application forms to minimise unconscious biases.
- Avoid "culture fit" or "gut feeling" as the sole reason for rejecting a potential applicant. When interviewers want to reject candidates for "culture fit" or a "gut feeling", it's often an indication that unconscious bias is at play. Challenge your interviewers to articulate a more specific explanation.
- Explicitly request a diverse range of referrals from recruiters or colleagues. Challenge your senior staff to think beyond the obvious candidates that they may know, as they may all be from the same demographic.

- Structure the interview process by having set questions and procedures. This can lead to higher-quality appointments because they help reduce bias and “gut-feeling” selection. By asking each candidate the same or a similar set of questions, you have a consistent data set and can be more objective.
- Ensure that underrepresented staff are included in your interviews wherever possible. This can show potential candidates that not everyone is from the same background and avoid common biases.
- Make sure you don’t automatically reject someone only because they have typos in their application, as they may have learning difficulties or other conditions that would not affect their actual performance.



Inclusive recruitment checklist

- Are at least two people involved in the short-listing process?
- Have all recruitment panel members completed general recruitment training?
- Has the job description been reviewed recently?
- Were a range of different people involved in drawing up the job description?
- Does the job description use gendered language?
- Does the job advert prominently state your commitment to diversity and inclusion, with details about what that looks like?
- Have you included a named contact for applicants with questions about accessibility and other accommodations?
- Have the CVs been anonymised?
- Have you ensured that any imagery represents the diversity of the candidate pool you are seeking to attract?
- Does your interview panel broadly reflect the demographics of the candidate pool?
- Has the interview panel agreed the key criteria before interviewing and reviewing candidates?

Case Study 1



Grace is a Black woman who has a master's degree in her field and many years of professional experience. She has applied for a job and does very well in a phone interview.

However, when she attends the second interview in person, the members of the interview panel seem surprised. They ask her about her heritage and where her family is from, before questioning her in minute detail about her degree and previous experience.

Grace is a little taken aback, as her understanding was that this interview was intended to be more casual and to get to know her as a person.

A few days later, she finds that she has been turned down for the role because she is "not a good culture fit".

Discuss with your team

- What are the issues in this case?
- Why do you think Grace received a different response in person?
- What could be done?

Case Study 2



Dan has severe anxiety and is on medication for it. Dan is very upfront about his anxiety and has no issue with potential employers being made aware of it.

Dan has asked if he can have some adjustments during the recruitment process, the most notable being not having interviews at certain times of the day (due to the effects of his medication) and interviews over Zoom.

Dan has a very impressive CV and an in-demand skillset. A job comes to your attention which you think he would be perfect for, and you send his CV over to your manager.

They are very excited about him and ask you to schedule an interview with him as soon as possible. You let them know about his mental health condition and his reasonable adjustments requests.

An hour later you receive an email from your manager stating they no longer wish to move forward with Dan's application.

Discuss with your team

- What are the issues in this case?
- Why do you think the manager did not want to interview Dan?
- How do you think this situation should be dealt with?

Case Study 3



Ziad is recommended for a job by a friend, applies, and is invited to an interview on a Friday afternoon. All the previous correspondence has been moving fast and with a friendly, conversational tone.

When he sees that the interview is on a Friday afternoon, he asks for the date or time to be moved, mentioning that he will be at his mosque at that time.

The recruitment administrator says that they will check with their superiors, but they never get back to Ziad despite his attempts to chase them.

A few weeks later, Ziad's friend informs him that the position is still open for applications, and encourages Ziad to try again. However, by this stage, he is very reluctant to do so.

Discuss with your team

- What bias might be at play in this case?
- What options are open to Ziad?

Action Plan



What have been the key learning points for you?

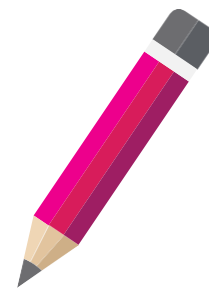
In terms of actions, what can you:

1. Start doing

2. Stop doing

3. Continue doing

How will you implement these actions into your department or role?



What support/further development will you need to implement these actions? Who from?

Additional Notes: