Addressing Unconscious Bias in the Workplace

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Radian Housing Association and University of Lincoln for supporting the project.

We would also like to thank St. George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Radian Housing Association for agreeing to be case studies for this project.

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Introduction

In 2015, the IPA published its report on diversity and inclusion and employee engagement called Diverse Voices. Our research found that there are gaps in engagement across various groups of the workforce and that one possible explanation for this could be the impact of unconscious bias on individual and organisational outcomes.

An extensive literature review, in-depth interviews at six case study organisations and interviews with experts in the field of diversity and inclusion suggested that the effect of unconscious bias can be quite detrimental to organisations and at an employee level - could lead to low levels of engagement and productivity and have a negative impact on staff morale. Unconscious bias also influences how an organisation recruits and promotes staff and how learning and development resources are shared between various groups.

To tackle this issue, organisations are spending millions of dollars commissioning unconscious bias training programmes. It is estimated that in the US alone, organisations have spent over $8 billion on their annual diversity and inclusion training (including unconscious bias awareness). However, there has been little research to assess the impact of such programmes. Some studies have shown that unconscious bias training programmes at tech companies like Google haven't delivered the desired outcomes. There is also research which suggests that poorly conducted training programmes that make it mandatory for employees to attend can actually increase bias amongst trainees. Nevertheless, organisations continue to invest considerable time, money and effort in commissioning these sessions.

In this report, we first define what unconscious bias is and explore the various types of biases that are known to have great impact on organisational culture and processes.

We briefly discuss the Implicit Association Test (IAT) which is the most widely used tool to measure implicit bias and elaborate on the various ways in which unconscious bias training programmes can be tailored to better meet the needs of organisations and their staff.

Our view is that before an organisation commissions a training programme on unconscious bias, it should ensure that it has in place the structures, policies and procedures to recognise, address and mitigate the impact of unconscious behaviours. It is extremely important that organisations first create an inclusive culture and take a holistic approach to tackling issues of equality, diversity and inclusion and not expect training session(s) on unconscious bias or diversity and inclusion to solve all issues related to equality and diversity. We also discuss the important role of the leadership team in cultivating and sustaining such a culture.

We hope this report adds to the wealth of research coming out on this topic – especially on the training front – and provide employers the opportunity to rethink their strategy on how best to tackle unconscious bias in the workplace.

Methodology

The study consisted of the following research methods:

- An extensive literature review
- Two in-depth case studies with organisations in the public and third sector.

The aim of the case studies was to understand the impact of unconscious bias and what strategies organisations are adopting to mitigate this. The case studies were based on in-depth interviews with a consortium of individuals - ranging from the senior leadership team to heads of departments and a trainer of unconscious bias. Almost all of those who were interviewed for the report had been part of an unconscious bias training programme and discussions with them mainly focussed on how it could be strengthened further.

The case studies included:

St. George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust **Radian Housing Association**

We would like to thank all the interviewees at case study organisations for giving up their personal and professional time to speak to us.

Most of all, we would like to thank our sponsors St. George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Radian Housing Association and University of Lincoln for supporting this study.

It is important to note that while the qualitative research included in this study is not representative of all employers, it does provide the opportunity to drill down and provide insights on people's views and experiences.

Executive summary

Unconscious bias refers to the biases we have but are unaware of. Our brains – which process around 200,000 individual pieces of information - are hard wired to categorise people based on their external attributes and this can be influenced by our upbringing, social interactions and the media for instance. While all of us are biased to varying degrees, some reject the idea that they are biased or have 'unconscious' discriminatory behaviours as they seek information that reinforces their thinking while rejecting evidence that contradicts this – a phenomenon called Confirmation Bias.

The origins of unconscious bias lie within our brain's *reflective* (C-) system and the *reflexive* (X-) system. Research shows that neural components of the C- system to be associated with controlled processing of information – i.e., slow operating, fast learning, reflective consciousness and effortful. Whereas the X- system is slow learning, fast operating, bidirectional with parallel-processing structures. Due to the bidirectional and fast operating nature of the X-system, it seems to be closely linked to implicit associations and how individuals behave and interact.

Unconscious bias can have serious implications on organisational and individual outcomes. This report – which is a follow up to the IPA's report on diversity and inclusion and employee engagement- examines the various types of biases, their impact on organisations, how they can be measured and what steps organisations can take mitigate its impact.

Unconscious behaviours can influence various organisational processes like recruitment, promotion, learning and development and individual outcomes like employee engagement, performance and productivity. When unaddressed, unconscious behaviours have the potential to create and reinforce a culture where employees are treated unfairly.

Various studies have shown that individuals belonging to minority groups can sometimes be victims of unconscious behaviours on part of some employers. For instance, research has shown that tall white men are automatically considered to be more suitable for leadership positions - while those belonging to minority groups face **'micro-inequities'** in the world of work - by being 'singled out, overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted based on an unchangeable characteristic such as race or gender.'

There are over 150 different types of biases identified so far but for the purposes of this report, we discuss the following, which seem to have a far greater impact on organisations than some others:

1. *Stereotyping* - a 'preconceived notion, particularly about a group of people.'
    a. *Stereotype threat* - a 'psychological phenomenon whereby a person's performance at a task can deteriorate merely by being made consciously aware that they are from a group that is stereotyped as performing poorly at that task' although there might not be any evidence to support this view.
2. *Social identity theory* – 'the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group.'
    a. *In-groups* – 'a social group to which a person psychologically identifies as being a member.'
    b. *Out-groups* – 'a social group to which a personal does not identify.'
3. *Similarity-attraction effect* – 'where individuals surround themselves with people similar to them in order to avoid challenges to their beliefs and values – even when at times such views could be stereotypical.'

4. *Ultimate attribution error* - where individuals tend to attribute positive behaviour by members of their 'in-group' to their innate ability, and negative behaviours to the situation in which they find themselves.
5. *Affect heuristic* - 'an emotion-based shortcut used within decision-making'
6. *Confirmation bias* – 'where individuals seek out information that confirms what we believe and ignore information that challenges this.'
    a. *Primacy effect* – 'a phenomenon where individuals come to a conclusion based on the information attained early in the process while discounting the information that is acquired later.'
    b. *Belief persistence* – 'where once an opinion is formed (based on information attained early in the process), it can be resistant to change even when provided with compelling evidence against it.'

All the biases mentioned above have some degree of influence on organisational processes and outcomes. For instance, , if an employer (observer) feels that an individual (target) belonging to a minority ethnic community is not suitable for a leadership position the company has advertised for, the former will only look at evidence that supports this bias or thinking. In this scenario, we have both stereotyping and confirmation bias working together impeding objective assessment of a potential candidate. This would not only have an impact on the morale and motivation of the individual but also on the organisation's potential to hire from a diverse pool of candidates.

The implicit association test (IAT) devised by researchers at Harvard University is considered to be the most dominant tool for measuring implicit biases. The rationale is that once individuals know where their biases lie, they have the opportunity to reflect upon them and come up with bias-mitigating strategies – either in an organisational setting or at an individual level.

A common goal of an unconscious bias training programme is to improve individuals' attitudes toward minority or out-groups. Organisations in the western economy are spending millions of dollars each year in commissioning such training programmes. It is estimated that in the US alone, organisations have spent over $8 billion on their annual diversity and inclusion training (including unconscious bias awareness). Tech companies like Google and Facebook have been in the forefront of introducing such programmes. But despite their commitment and investment – both in terms of time and financial resources – there has been no major shift in the number of employees from minority groups.

One of the reasons for this could be organisational culture. Organisations need 'fertile soil' in place before the 'seeds' of training interventions can grow.

If an organisation does not have in place the policies and procedures to address unconscious behaviours and a culture where differences are valued and everyone – despite their backgrounds and external attributes– are given the opportunity to realise their potential and utilise the skills – neither capital nor personnel investment in training programmes will deliver any great benefits for the organisation.

Organisations should steer away from framing the discussion around unconscious bias as a discriminatory issue but rather as an opportunity for personal development in relation to the fair treatment of all employees.

Leadership needs to take a leading role by being part of the training programme themselves and by encouraging a culture where employees can recognise where their biases lie and how they can addressed.

Where unconscious bias is seen to be having an impact on the workforce, organisations should have the structures in place to address the issue openly with their staff rather than ignore it. For instance, the impact of unconscious bias on recruitment procedures has been widely researched. Various studies have shown that the names of applicants can determine whether they would be called for an interview or not. Organisations should consider what information they need to know from prospective applicants. The name of an applicant or where the individual went to university would have a bearing on how far an applicant progresses in the recruitment cycle but would not be an accurate predictor of how the individual performs in the role.

Finally, employers need to run timely surveys to understand what specific issues of unconscious bias exist at their workplace and to what extent implicit bias impacts on the workforce could vary from departments, location of the offices etc.

Simply commissioning mandatory training programmes to address unconscious bias in the absence of appropriate policies or structures will not create an inclusive culture or minimise the impact of unconscious behaviours. At times, such programmes could backfire and instead lead to negative outcomes.

Once organisations have in place the policies and procedures to recognise, address and mitigate the impact of unconscious bias, the next logical step would be to commission a training programme on unconscious bias. In this report, we look at five techniques which could help reduce implicit bias:

Implicit bias training programmes

> …*to discount commonly held stereotypes* – intervention to minimise the social categorisation (i.e., the formation of in-groups and out-groups) by challenging the commonly held stereotypes about particular groups.
>
> …*using context to influence implicit responses* - training a certain group of participants to consider situational factors in determining the opposite group's negative stereotype behaviours led to decreased 'automatic stereotype activation'.
>
> …*changing the way an out-group member is evaluated and categorised* – by encouraging members belonging to in-groups and out-groups to recognise common characteristics and promoting inter-group contact.
>
> …*using motivation to change responses to an out-group* – encouraging participants to use their internal motivation to suppress or control implicit responses and
>
> …*encouraging people to take responsibility for their implicit biases* – and work in conjunction with their employers to come up with bias mitigating strategies.

Training in unconscious bias does not have to be a passive activity and could be a combination of the techniques mentioned in this chapter. Most importantly, organisations must ensure that no one group is stigmatised in the process and that employees have the autonomy to choose whether to be part of the training programme, and should be encouraged to make themselves aware of their own biases and come up with bias-mitigating strategies.

We hope that this study will add to the wealth of research emerging on this topic and will give employers the opportunity to rethink their strategies on how best to address the issue of unconscious bias.

What is unconscious bias?

"The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend."
— Robertson Davies, Tempest-Tost

Unconscious bias refers to the biases we have but are not aware of. These happen automatically and are triggered by our brains making quick judgements and assessments of people which are influenced by our upbringing, external environment and personal experiences.[i]

Unconscious bias – as the term suggests - 'operates in an unconscious fashion', while explicit bias (conscious discrimination) 'functions in a conscious mode' and can be self-reported.[ii] But Davido *et al,* (1997) suggest that implicit biases are often more reliable in predicting behaviours as they are separate from a person's 'declared or endorsed beliefs or principles'.[ii] [iii] [iv]

While public attitudes towards diversity have changed drastically, it would be incorrect to study the real impact of unconscious bias based just on the nine protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation), as one could be biased against individuals with tattoos, piercings or those that speak with an accent.

Unconscious bias can have a significant impact on how we interact and associate with people – and on our attitudes and behaviours. Unconscious actions and attitudes are deep-rooted in our thinking – all of us have a degree of unconscious behaviours that come out situationally – and these could have serious implications on organisational processes – like recruitment, engagement, promotion, and on organisational behaviour and decision-making.

The term unconscious bias is used interchangeably with 'implicit bias' or 'cognitive bias'. While they describe the same phenomenon, implicit bias 'questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially as we are increasingly being made aware of them.'[i] In this report, we will be using the terms unconscious bias, implicit bias and cognitive bias interchangeably.

What are the origins of unconscious bias?

'Implicit bias is a type of bias pertaining to the mental processes of perception, memory, judgement and reasoning.'[i] The unconscious brain processes around 200,000 times more information than our conscious brain.

Satpute and Lieberman (2006) suggest a dual-process model to explain how our brains process this information and respond.[v] Their research shows that our brains use 'two systems' to process information – the *reflective* (C-) system and the *reflexive* (X-) system.

Neural components of the C- system seem to be associated with controlled processing of information – i.e., slow operating, fast learning, reflective consciousness and effortful. Whereas the X- system is slow learning, fast operating, bidirectional with parallel-processing structures. Satpute and Lieberman suggest that due to the bidirectional and fast operating nature of the X-system, it is closely linked to implicit associations and has the potential to influence one's judgement and behaviour. But as we will see in later chapters, these associations are not necessarily rigid and are prone to some degree of change.[vi]

The dual-process model proposed by Satpute and Lieberman is similar to the 'two systems of mental processing of information' proposed by Daniel Kahneman (2011) in his influential book - *Thinking, fast and slow*[vii]:

1) System 1 – which is fast, automatic, emotional, stereotypic, and subconscious with 'little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.'
2) System 2 – which is slow, effortful, infrequent, logical, calculating, and conscious. 'System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations.'

One of the reasons why many of us are unaware of our biases or reject the idea that we have any is because System 1 legitimises these behaviours by 'unconsciously pursuing, preferring and remembering information that supports their stereotypes while ignoring, discounting and forgetting information that challenges them.'[viii] A very good illustration of this is '**confirmation bias',** where we seek out information that confirms what we believe and ignore information that challenges this.[ix]

In the next chapter, we look at the how implicit or unconscious bias has an impact on organisational behaviours and decision-making abilities.

What is the organisational impact of unconscious bias?

There is a growing awareness amongst academics and employers that unconscious bias has serious implications on various organisational processes like recruitment, retention, engagement, decision-making and organisational behaviour in general.

Consider this statistic – while only 15 per cent of American men are over six foot **tall**, almost 60 per cent of corporate CEOs are over six foot tall.[x] Furthermore, less than 4 per cent of American men are over six foot, two inches tall, yet more than 36 per cent of corporate CEOs are over six foot, two inches tall. [x] Judge and Cable found that 'when corrected for age and gender, an inch of height is worth approximately $789 per year in salary.[x] It might sound 'amusing' to many that physical appearances like height could determine how far one moves up in the career ladder or how much salary one gets paid, however, such attributes seem to 'unconsciously' influence our views of others and the decisions we make.

Research by Jaluch in 2015 found that 36 per cent of people think **disabled** people are not as productive while 67 per cent of the British public admit feeling 'uncomfortable' talking to disabled individuals.[xi] Their research also found that **gay and lesbian** jobseekers are 5 per cent less likely to be called for an interview and that the salary offered to gay candidates is 2 per cent lower than heterosexuals. There are some other studies which show that gay women tend to earn more than heterosexual women.[xii] In terms of **physical appearance**, the study found that women were discriminated against as a result of their weight when their BMI is 27 while men were not at serious risk of weight bias until their BMI is 35. While overweight men tended to earn 2.3 per cent less than their colleagues, overweight women earn 6.2 per cent less than their colleagues. The **accent** of individuals also seemed to prompt implicit biases amongst some employers. For instance, Jaluch found that 80 per cent of 2,647 employers who participated in their study admitted to making decisions based on regional accents with accents from Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Glasgow and London/Cockney voted as being the top five work accents. 63 per cent of workers admitted to hiding their accent in a job interview fearing negative outcomes. In terms of **age**, the study found that while people over 70 years of age were generally viewed as being more friendly and as having higher moral standards and more competent than workers in their 20s, 15 per cent thought that having a 70 year old boss would be unacceptable.

A much more recent study of 130 minority **ethnic** senior executive and board leaders by the networking organisation 'Engage' and recruitment firm 'Harvey Nash' found that 63 per cent believe unconscious bias of CEOs and leadership teams is one of the leading reasons why there is very little ethnic diversity at board level.[xiii] Furthermore, 38 per cent of respondents believe that ethnic bias is part of society's 'wider culture' while 1 in 4 believe that bias and discrimination are part of organisational culture.[xiii] 2 in 3 also believed that minority ethnic executives are not in the talent pools or networks of the current non-executive directors and executives or of executive search firms. 8 in 10 participants believed that factors other than their merit have hindered their career while 7 in 10 said they felt their ethnicity/cultural background has been a significant barrier to their progression.[xiii]

The examples illustrated above show that certain groups of individuals seem to be gaining '**micro-rewards**' in their careers due to their external attributes, while others seem to face '**micro-inequities** by being 'singled out, overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted based on an unchangeable characteristic such as race or gender.'[xiv] [xiv]

These are often unconscious behaviours but with potential to have a lasting impact on our decision-making abilities and can 'devalue, discourage and impair workforce performance.'[ix] From an organisational point of view, unconscious bias impedes our ability to recruit and promote the right talent – as we tend to assess individuals subjectively (based on height, weight, age, ethnicity etc.) and not on their knowledge or skills.

What are the different types of biases?

There are over 150 different types of biases identified so far.[xv] While all biases have a degree of impact on organisational processes and outcomes, in this chapter, we will look at a few that have been extensively researched and are known to greatly influence organisational behaviour.

As we highlighted in the previous chapter, certain groups of individuals seem to be gaining micro-rewards in their professional life due to external attributes like height, weight etc. For instance, we saw how there is a tendency amongst some employers to hire tall men for leadership roles. This could be due to perception biases such as **stereotypes** and assumptions, which hinder objective assessment of individuals. Stereotyping forms the basis for how we categorise individuals.

When an observer notices that a 'target' belongs to a stereotyped group (especially an 'out-group' – discussed later in this chapter), characteristics that are stereotypically linked to the group are activated – even if one tries to consciously reject these.[viii] This has an impact on the subsequent decisions the observer makes. For instance, if an employer (observer) feels that an individual (target) belonging to a minority ethnic community is not suitable for a leadership position the company has advertised for, the former will only look at evidence that supports this bias or thinking. In this scenario, we have both stereotyping and confirmation bias working together obstructing objective assessment of a potential candidate.

A very simple yet interesting experiment by Fiske *et al* (1999) found that during a 'sentence-completion task', when subjects were instructed to avoid sexist statements – they complied only when enough time was given to complete the task. But when pressed for time, their statements were more sexist and stereotypical than the control group who had not been instructed to avoid sexist statements.[xvi]

This experiment illustrates Satpute and Liberman's 'dual process model' that when individuals have sufficient time to process the information that is provided to them, our brains operate in a reflective mode, make a balanced assessment and come up with an appropriate response – whereas when time is limited, the reflexive part of the brain – which is fast operating and bi-directional in nature - is activated prompting individuals to make snap judgements and decisions that they are not consciously aware of.

Therefore, it is essential that during the processes of recruitment, selection and promotion, the hiring team has access to all relevant information about the prospective candidate's skills and is given enough time to examine the information in order to avoid subjective decision-making. Where the process if rushed, individuals more often than not rely on stereotypes or cognitive shortcuts to reach an outcome. This can be detrimental to both the employee and the employer.

Organisational implications

Stereotyping individuals or groups of individuals has a negative impact on the ethical climate of an organisation.

Organisations can only perform well if they are able to recruit from a diverse pool of candidates, but when stereotyping is rife, this would 'put-off' certain groups of individuals from applying as a result of which the employer loses out on recruiting or promoting the best person for the job.

Stereotyping can also impact the morale and performance of the targeted individuals or groups. Employees could become disengaged, withdraw from their work eventually impacting on the organisation's 'bottom-line'.

Stereotyping forms the basis for the formation of in-groups and out-groups within organisations, with those belonging to the out-group having differential access to organisational resources and relationships.

There is also the possibility of employees suing their employer if they feel that they are constantly stereotyped and discriminated against.

Those that belong to minority groups might also face what is called a – **stereotype threat** – a 'psychological phenomenon whereby a person's performance at a task can deteriorate merely by being made consciously aware that they are from a group that is stereotyped as performing poorly at that task' although there might not be any evidence to support this view.[xvii] In most cases, those that are victims of stereotype threat are not always aware of what is happening.

Stereotype threat has an impact on how 'targeted groups' excel, or want to excel in stereotype-relevant domains. For instance, the Implicit Association Test (discussed later in this report), which 'measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report', reveals that there in an implicit attitude amongst many to associate males with science and mathematics and females with arts and language.[xviii]

Organisations that have an environment of associating certain groups of individuals with negative stereotypes can have serious implications on the targeted group's career aspirations. For instance, Davies, Spencer, and Steele (2005 as cited in Kray and Shirako 2009) observed that women who viewed gender stereotypic television commercials were less likely to choose leadership roles in subsequent tasks.[xix] Similarly, Niederle and Yestrumskas [(2009) as cited in Laura J. Kray, Aiwa Shirako, 2009] found that women who were unsure of their ability to complete a 'maze task' were less likely than men to select 'difficult subsequent maze tasks' even though the rewards were greater and there was no real difference in the abilities of the two genders.[xix]

Organisational implications

Although stereotype threat is quite prevalent within organisations, it has been traditionally studied in women and ethnic minorities. But there are members of other groups who can be impacted by this.

Stereotype threat is related to a number of negative organisational outcomes like poor performance and low morale.

Stereotype threat may explain the underrepresentation of women in academic and professional fields related to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Stereotype threat may also be partly responsible for the underrepresentation of those belonging to minority groups (like women, BAME individuals) in leadership roles.

Stereotype threat can lead to a variety of outcomes like 'disengagement' and 'disidentification' from the group and the domain that is stereotyped (for instance, maths and science for women), and the 'victims' attributing their performance to external factors rather than their innate ability to do the job (https://www.apa.org/education/ce/stereotype-threat.pdf.)

Biases also arise partly because of the way our brains categorise people to reach a quick judgment or outcome. We investigated this extensively in the IPA's report – Diverse Voices – which examined the links between diversity and inclusion and employee engagement.[xx]

People tend to compare themselves to their 'social unit' to see if they are similar or dissimilar. For instance, **social identity theory** proposes that as individuals, we are driven to feel positively about ourselves and therefore surround ourselves with people similar to us forming an **'in-group'** – while looking at the rest as being from an **'out-group'**. This separation of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' helps reaffirm the individual's desires for identity and self-worth.[xxi]

But this has consequences on organisational behaviour. While 'in-groups' may have higher satisfaction scores, it will result in a perverse pressure towards homogeneity (uniformity) with managers hiring *'mini me's'*. Where differences are suppressed due to organisational or group pressures, individuals come under pressure to 'cover' themselves, which, in his paper 'Uncovering Talent' he breaks down into four types:[xxii]

- Appearance-based covering – where individuals alter their self-presentation
- Affiliation-based covering – where individuals avoid behaviours widely associated with their identity
- Advocacy-based covering – how much individuals stick up for their group
- Association-based covering – how much individuals avoid contact with other group members

He argues that dissatisfaction at work will rise where covering is common. As he says '50 per cent of respondents said this expectation by leaders to 'cover' has 'somewhat' to 'extremely' affected their sense of commitment to the organization.'[xxii] [xxiii]

On the flip side of covering is the **similarity-attraction effect**, which makes individuals surround themselves with people similar to them in order to avoid challenges to their beliefs and values – even when at times such views could be stereotypical. Under these circumstances, the 'in-group'

helps individuals to reinforce their ideas of self-worth by seeing themselves as better than members of the 'out-group'.

An extension to the above mentioned forms of biases is the **ultimate attribution error** – where individuals tend to attribute positive behaviour by members of their 'in-group' to their innate ability, and negative behaviours to the situation in which they find themselves. However, this is reversed for the 'out-group', where positive behaviour is attributed to external causes and negative behaviour blamed on the individual. This could potentially have serious consequences on organisational decision-making. For instance, when a member from a minority (out-group) group is promoted, it may be considered by some as positive discrimination while disregarding their ability to do the job. Whereas when an employee from the majority (in-group) work group is promoted, it may be credited to their innate ability to get the job done.

Members of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' may also have differential access to social networks and friendships at work, with members belonging to the 'out-group' excluded from forming informal relationships in turn affecting their level of access to natural sources of information and other resources needed to function at an optimal level in the organisation. This is especially difficult for those employees who form less than 15 per cent of the total work force.[xxiv]

Organisational implications

'In-group favouritism' refers to a preference and affinity for one's in-group over the out-group or anyone viewed as not belonging to the in-group. This can have an impact on how organisational resources are allocated, in evaluation of others, differential access to forming social relationships at work and knowledge sharing.

In-group members have a tendency to significantly overestimate their own abilities and skills while underrating the abilities of the out-group. This could have an impact on who is promoted within organisations and how performance management systems and appraisals are managed.

The prevalence of in-groups and out-groups can also lead to inter-group aggression or inter-group conflict bringing down the performance of the organisation as a whole.

As members of in-groups surround themselves with individuals who are similar to them in order to avoid conflict and harmonise the decision-making process – group conformity takes precedence over critical analysis and innovation.

Another type of bias that could have serious implications on recruitment, promotion and decision-making is **affect heuristic**. Heuristics are 'cognitive shortcuts that rely on very little information of modest cognitive resources' and are not very different from implicit biases. Affect heuristic is described as being 'an emotion-based shortcut used within decision-making'.[xxv] [xxvi]

This happens when an individual judges someone's suitability for a role based on noticeable factors like tattoos or personal body weight standards – particularly when very little relevant information is available. An investigation by Geil *et al* (2012) identified alarming biases in HR professionals where they tended to underestimate the suitability of obese individuals in supervisory positions while the ability of 'normal-weight' individuals was overestimated. Research by Jaluch also similar instances where an individual's external attributes like height, BMI and accent – which have no bearing on the person's ability to do the job – tended to influence an employer's hiring decisions.

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We also highlighted **confirmation bias** in the previous chapter - a phenomenon where we only look at evidences that confirm, rather than contradict, our own hypothesis. It occurs when people have certain beliefs about themselves and their social identity group (i.e., in-group or out-group) and seek information that reinforces these beliefs.[xxvii] For instance, if a manager holds a belief that employees who have just returned from their maternity leave might not be open to the idea of taking up important and additional responsibilities at work – he/she would seek information to support this bias – while discounting examples that do not support this view. This would lead to disengagement amongst the particular group of employees as they feel left out of important tasks and decisions.

Overtime, confirmation bias may also lead to the **'primacy effect'** – a phenomenon where individuals come to a conclusion based on the information attained early in the process while discounting the information that is acquired later.[xxviii] For instance, an individual who shows up late for an interview but performs really well may suffer the consequences of the primacy effect. An extension of the primacy effect is '**belief persistence**' where once an opinion is formed (based on information attained early in the process), it can be resistant to change even when provided with compelling evidence against it.

When belief persistence is high, individuals might even question the information that is attained later in the information process (and which does not reaffirm their existing beliefs) and are more likely to see 'ambiguous information to be confirming of pre-existing beliefs than disconfirming of them.[xxviii]

Organisational implications

Many research studies have shown that individuals tend to seek information that reaffirms their hypotheses. This can have serious implications on organisational decision-making.

Confirmation bias inhibits individuals from assessing situations objectively. For instance, when a manager is looking recruit internally for a position, he or she might seek positive information that paints their favoured candidate in good light while actively ignoring information that might challenge this belief.

By ignoring facts that can help reach an objective decision, organisations lose out on recruiting the best talent, while having a negative impact on the morale and engagement of those within the organisation who may feel that their organisation is unfair in its decision-making.

How does unconscious bias influence organisational culture?

Although unconscious bias has an effect on the individual, it can have a far greater impact on the culture of an organisation. This might explain why when organisations have a clear set of diversity and inclusion policies in place, fail to make any great strides in achieving their objectives.

Organisational culture can be defined as 'an enduring collection of basic assumptions and ways of interpreting things that a given organisation has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its internal and external influences.'[xxix]

As discussed in the previous chapter, unconscious biases have a great influence on organisational decision-making and behaviours and is one of the reasons why when organisations undertake large scale programmes to change behaviours, most fail. Despite numerous efforts on the part of the organisation, 'organisational unconscious perpetuates the status quo and keeps old patterns, values, and behavioural norms firmly rooted.'[xxix]

For instance, flexible working is one area where an employer's 'conscious choice' to have the provision in place for all employees seems to be in conflict with the 'organisation's unconscious' where those that take up the option of flexible working are sometimes seen as being 'less committed', 'less valuable' or 'less desirable member of the team'. [xxix] While the organisation might extensively advocate the benefits of flexible working (like increased employee satisfaction, engagement and performance), the organisation's 'unconscious' culture of mistrust and fear towards those that take up the option of flexible working breeds a culture where employees feel cynical and frustrated due to the mixed signals being sent out by the employer while the employer might be unware of the conflict.

Measuring unconscious bias

The Implicit Association Test (also known as the IAT or the Harvard IAT) is the dominant tool for measuring unconscious bias. Developed by a team of scientists at Harvard University, the test is used to examine positive or negative associations and 'response latency' – i.e., 'the time taken between being delivered a stimulus (like a picture or a word) and the person's response (bad or good).'[i] The Harvard IAT measures 'response latency' through computerised timing and is designed to analyse individual differences in making automatic associations between concepts (e.g. white v black people) and attributes (e.g. good v bad). The test's principle is that easier pairings (i.e., faster responses) are more strongly associated than more difficult pairings (i.e., slower responses).[i]

Since the introduction of the Harvard IAT in 1998, many other derivatives of the test have been developed to address some of its drawbacks and to better tailor it to particular research contexts. However, the Harvard IAT is the most widely used tool to test for implicit bias and has been completed by over 14 million people so far.

In a typical unconscious bias training programme, individuals might take tests, like the IAT, to ascertain where their biases lie and the rationale is that once we are aware of these biases, we reflect upon them and reshape our thinking.

Addressing implicit bias

For many organisations, training staff to enhance their understanding of unconscious bias seems to be an attractive proposition, however, employers need to be cognizant of the fact that it is not a silver bullet with which they can fix all organisational issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion or organisational behaviour and decision-making.

It is estimated that in the US alone, organisations have spent over $8 billion on their annual diversity and inclusion training (including unconscious bias awareness). Additionally, venture capitalists have invested over $50 million dollars on software products addressing bias.[xxx]

Tech companies like Google and Facebook have been at the forefront of introducing unconscious bias training programmes within their organisations – they also have the financial resources to introduce some robust training programmes.

Tech companies are known to be predominantly white and male. For instance, 70 per cent of Apple's 98,000 employees are male, 69 per cent of Facebook's 7,200 staff are male and 70 per cent of 48,600 Google employees are male.[xxxi] Men also make up 83 per cent of Google's engineering employees and 79 per cent of its managers. The trend continues at other tech companies like Twitter and Yahoo – where men make up the most number of employees.

But how successful have these interventions been?

Google launched its unconscious bias training programme in 2014, when the tech giant's workforce was made up of around 70 per cent men and 30 per cent women. The proportion of African-American employees was at 2 per cent, Hispanic employees 3 per cent, Asian employees 30 per cent and white employees 61 per cent. In 2016 – after the introduction of their unconscious bias training programme, analysis of Google's workforce data does not show that much progress has been made on diversity. Google's current female workforce stands at 31 per cent – a 1 percentage point increase from 2014, while the proportion of African-American, Hispanic employees has remained at 2 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. The number of Asian employees has gone up by 2 percentage points. However, Google claims that in 2015, 4 per cent of its new hires were Black compared to 2 per cent of their current population and that 21 per cent of new hires in 2015 were women in tech, compared to 19 per cent of their current population.

Similarly, a comprehensive review of 31 years of data from 830 mid-size to large U.S. workplaces found that the kind of diversity training programmes being undertaken by organisations followed by a '7.5 per cent drop in the number of women in management roles' – with the most negative impact being felt by those organisations that saw the introduction of the training programmes as a means to avoid liability in a discrimination lawsuit.[xxxii]

So why hasn't investment and dedication to address unconscious bias in the workplace delivered the benefits these organisations desire?

One of the reasons for this could be organisational culture.[xxxiii] If an organisation does not have an environment where 'differences' are valued and everyone is treated equally, the time and financial investment an organisation dedicates in tackling unconscious behaviours will not yield the desired results. This positive culture cannot be created by simply commissioning a training programme to tackle unconscious bias but by having robust policies and procedures in place to confront unconscious behaviours. For instance, knowledge intensive companies that thrive on innovation but discriminate against women and individuals belonging to minority ethnic groups by not providing

them with opportunities to fully utilise and develop their skills will not see the dial on diversity turn despite investing heavily on unconscious bias training programmes.

We believe that before an organisation commissions a training programme on unconscious bias, it should ensure that it has in place the structures, policies and procedures to recognise, address and mitigate the impact of unconscious behaviours. Organisations need 'fertile soil' in place before the 'seeds' of training interventions can grow.[xxxiv]

First, organisations need to reframe the discussion on unconscious bias around the fair treatment of all employees and not specifically on diversity and inclusion. As discussed earlier in this report, the impact of unconscious bias is far greater than just the nine protected characteristics. Also, by steering the topic of unconscious bias towards discrimination, organisations might risk alienating those individuals who are not aware of their biases and don't see their behaviours as being discriminatory. The best way to encourage employees to sign up for an unconscious bias training programme is by promoting it as an area of 'personal development' than as a session on 'combating discrimination.'

Second, where unconscious bias is seen to be having an impact on the workforce, organisations should have the structures in place to address the issue openly with their staff rather than ignore it. For instance, the impact of unconscious bias on **recruitment** procedures has been widely researched. Various studies have shown that the names of applicants can determine whether they would be called for an interview or not.[i] For instance, research has shown that the more 'ethnic' a name of the candidate, the less likely they were to be contacted, even when all the information on the CV matched a familiar name.[i]

To mitigate this bias, organisations should consider what information they need to know from prospective applicants. While an applicant's name or where the individual went to university would have a bearing on how far he/she progresses in the recruitment cycle, it might not be an accurate predictor of how the individual performs in the role. Some organisations are now implementing what is called a 'name-blind recruitment' strategy where the names of the applicants are not asked while applying. 'Name-blind recruitment' is set to take effect for UCAS applications from 2017 and the Civil Service and the NHS by 2020.[xxxv] Private companies like HSBC and Deloitte are also looking to implement 'name-blind recruitment' practices from 2017 in their graduate, apprentice-level and some other streams.

The next step is to sustain objective decision making during the **selection** stage when recruiters or hiring managers assess the applicant in person. Ensuring that the selection panel is made up of a diverse group of individuals could reduce the risk of unconscious bias during the process.[xxxvi] Some other steps organisations could take to lessen the impact of implicit bias are ensuring that all those involved in the selection process are made aware of their biases and are provided with the tools necessary to minimise its effect on their decision-making capabilities. This can be achieved by ensuring that the process isn't rushed and that the selection panel has enough time to reach an objective decision based on the candidate's skills and knowledge.

Three, medium and large organisations should ensure that they have a diverse group of internal role-models to encourage those belonging to minority groups to excel in stereotype relevant domains. Research by Business in the Community (BITC) showed that for individuals belonging to the BAME community to thrive and progress within organisations, it was essential that organisations had role-models from the group.[xxxvii]

Four, leadership is an important factor in creating an inclusive culture. Before an organisation rolls out an unconscious bias training programme for its staff, it is imperative that the leaders undergo the training first and raise their own awareness of unconscious bias.

There is often a rhetoric/reality gap between what leaders say about diversity and what they actually end up doing. Many unconscious bias training programmes have a module on training leaders to be inclusive and to help make objective decision. Such training programmes allow leaders to identify their own biases and how they have an impact on effective leadership.

Leadership behaviour has a powerful influence on the engagement and performance of employees and the experiences of diverse groups in an organisation. 'Inclusive leadership' emerges as a dominant theme in the ability to engage effectively with a diverse workforce. BITC describes inclusive leaders as *"those that get the best out of all their people, helping their organisations to succeed in today's complex, diverse national and global environment. Through their skills in adaptability, building relationships and developing talent, inclusive leaders are able to increase performance and innovation."*[xxxviii] BITC found that over 81 per cent of employees that have worked with an inclusive leader were engaged and loyal to the organisation. Inclusive leaders were also effective in breaking down barriers to progression experienced by many women and minority groups in organisations. Over 80 per cent of employees from all backgrounds reported that an inclusive leader helped to increase their self-confidence and made them feel more valued. [xxxviii]

Finally, employers need to run timely surveys to understand what specific issues of unconscious bias exist at their workplace and to what extent implicit bias impacts on the workforce could vary from departments, location of the offices etc.

Simply commissioning mandatory training programmes to address unconscious bias in the absence of appropriate policies or structures will not create an inclusive culture or minimise the impact of unconscious behaviours. At times, such programmes could backfire and instead lead to negative outcomes.[xxxii] Organisations need to take a holistic approach to tackle implicit bias, understand why individuals have these biases and have the policies in place to tackle such behaviours.

In the next chapter, we look at how organisations can move away from a 'one size fits all' training programme for unconscious bias and better tailor it to the needs of the organisation and its employees.

Techniques to address unconscious bias

Once an organisation has in place the culture and leadership required to create an inclusive workplace –where individuals can recognise and address their biases in a safe environment – the next logical step would be to introduce a training programme.

A common goal of a diversity training is to improve individuals' attitudes toward minority or out-groups.[xxxix] However, in addition to classroom based training programmes where trainees are 'taught' about what unconscious bias is and why it needs to be tackled, researchers and organisations are coming up with some innovative methods and techniques to address unconscious bias in the workplace. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) looked at a few techniques for reducing implicit bias and categorised them as follows:[i]

Unconscious bias training programmes

…to discount commonly held stereotypes
…using context to influence implicit responses
…changing the way an out-group member is evaluated and categorised
…using motivation to change responses to an out-group
…encouraging people to take responsibility for their implicit biases

1. Intervention to discount commonly held stereotypes

The aim of this intervention is to minimise social categorisation (i.e., the formation of in-groups and out-groups) by challenging the commonly held stereotypes about particular groups. This can be achieved by exposing participants to positive examples (role models) from stereotype relevant domains (that run counter to the stereotype). For instance, women are stereotypically not seen as having leadership qualities. Counter-stereotypical examples of women who demonstrate the characteristics of leaders and who hold significant positions within organisations might mitigate the impact of stereotyping and stereotype threat.[i]

In a laboratory and field based study, Dasgupta and Asgari found that exposure to female leaders reduced women's automatic gender stereotypic beliefs.[xl] In their research, two groups of female students were studied, one in a mixed college and other in a same-sex (female only) college, where they were exposed to women within their college, for instance, female deans, professors and science lecturers. After a term at college, women who attended the mixed college had greater implicit gender bias than when they started college. In contrast, women who attended an all-women's college and were exposed to female professors or lecturers had less implicit gender bias than when they started.

Those that studied in the all-women's college were also exposed to 'counter-stereotypic examples' of females studying and teaching maths and science courses where as in the mixed college, this exposure was minimal because of the underrepresentation of women in these roles. The more female students were taught by female faculty members the more they implicitly associated women with leadership qualities and excelling in stereotype relevant domains like science and maths.

Policy implications

The study by Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) highlights the importance of students and staff being exposed to 'counter stereotypic examples'.

For instance, a study by Plant *et al* in 2009 showed that the levels of implicit racial bias against black people among 74 white participants' reduced when they were exposed to positive, counter-stereotypic Black exemplar (e.g. Barack Obama). This has been termed as the 'Obama effect'. *(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247331761_The_Obama_Effect_Decreasing_Implicit_Prejudice_and_Stereotyping).*

Training programmes on unconscious bias need to demystify the belief that men are associated with leadership positions. It is crucial that organisations actively promote diverse groups of leaders and encourage them to act as role models to others within the organisation.

If an organisation that has commissioned an unconscious bias training programme has leaders from minority groups, the session must make the participants aware of this. If there aren't any role-models from within the organisation, trainers should provide external examples.

2. Intervention by using context to influence implicit responses

As discussed earlier in the report, individuals tend to associate positive behaviours by their in-group to their innate abilities and negative behaviours to the situation in which they find themselves. However, this is reversed for the 'out-group', where positive behaviour is attributed to external causes and negative behaviour blamed on the individual. This is called the Ultimate Attribution Error (UAE) and could have serious consequences on organisational decision-making.

Situational Attribution Training, devised by Stewart *et al* (2010) seems to reduce this behaviour to a certain extent.[xli] They found that training a certain group of participants to consider situational factors in determining the opposite group's negative stereotype behaviours led to decreased 'automatic stereotype activation'. For instance, rather than stereotyping certain groups of individuals who turn up late for work as being 'lazy' or 'disinterested', situational attribution training could help managers to think beyond the commonly held stereotypical beliefs on why a particular individual(s) turns up late for work and discuss with the employee how the organisation could help him/her achieve a better work-life balance.

In their study, Stewart *et al* (2010) recruited 72 white undergraduates and split them into a training group and a control group. The training cohort were asked to assign situational (rather than dispositional) explanations to behaviours relating to negative stereotypes about a group of men belonging to a certain racial category. One example was a picture of a man belonging to the respective racial category with a line reading 'arrived at work an hour late'. The participants then had to choose either 'the power went out and he reset his alarm' or 'he is particularly irresponsible person' as the explanation. They found that those trained to look for situational reasons showed reduced levels of stereotyping and implicit bias towards negative stereotypes of the men in the subsequent tasks compared to the control group.

A possible explanation for this mechanism by which positive examples influence implicit bias is that they create a context in which 'race' takes a 'back seat'. However, a study by Allen *et al* (2010) showed that individuals who were highly motivated to control biases were able to reduce implicit

bias in positive contexts (like turning up late for work because of caring responsibilities) but that this was due to successful inhibition of biases rather than reduced activation of biases.[xlii]

Policy implications

Training individuals to recognise Ultimate Attribution Error (UAE) (via situational attribution training for instance), and how this impacts on their work is crucial. This could help individuals understand UAE more and how to counteract the phenomenon.

However, Stewart et *al's* (2010) study did not measure how long the effect of the training programme persisted post-training and whether it had any impact on selection/promotion decisions.

Organisations that intend to commission training on UAE (or indeed on unconscious bias) can measure the impact of the programme by evaluating the extent of change before and after it was introduced.

Organisations must ensure that they do not pick out a single group of individuals with similar dispositional characteristics for situational attribution training. The training programme should include a diverse range of examples suitable for a diverse group of trainees.

A good first step would be to include situational attribution training or any unconscious bias training programme as part of the induction session for newcomers. This would reduce the risk of alienating individual groups of employees.

3. Intervention to change the way an out-group member is evaluated and categorised

As highlighted in the report, one of the negative outcomes of stereotyping is the formation of in-groups and out-groups, with those belonging to the in-group receiving preferential treatment and those from the out-group having differential access to organisational resources and relationships. Often, this could have a negative impact on the performance of the groups and the organisation as a whole.

Hall *et al* (2009) found that by asking those belonging to the in-group and out-group to identify shared characteristics between them reduced implicit bias significantly. This has been called the **de-categorisation theory.**[xliii] However, when group identity was made 'noticeable' or 'important', they failed to find any result. This shows us that where individuals feel deeply committed to their group and group identity, it might be difficult to 'blur' intergroup boundaries and this could manifest in an increase in explicit bias amongst group members. For instance, if someone is highly committed to their identity as a parent, they could resist being included under an overarching 'gender' identity. Therefore, employers must ensure that when work groups or teams are created - they are made up of diverse group of employees.

Members belonging to in-groups and out-groups could also benefit from interpersonal contact. Allport's (1954) **'contact hypothesis'** states that contact with out-group members could lead to more positive attitudes about the out-group when individuals belonging to the two groups have 'equal status, have common goals, are in a cooperative or interdependent setting, have personal interaction and support from authorities.'[i] Allport suggests that contact that meets this criteria will improve intergroup attitudes more than contact that does not.

Understanding why contact has the impact it does would be helpful in designing interventions based on the theory. Contact could possibly have the impact it does because it 'reduces intergroup anxiety,

disconfirms stereotypes and individuates the minority group member.' It could also be a combination of all of these processes.[i]

Policy implications

One of the barriers organisations might face in implementing training interventions to encourage intergroup contact would be the challenge of identifying members belonging to in-groups and out-groups. Whether this is possible in organisational settings open for debate.

Organisations may circumvent this by encouraging diverse groups of individuals to attend the training session and in turn form sub-groups during the session - where each sub-group is asked to interact with each other to discuss a work issue.

Another possible policy solution would be to introduce a mentoring programme – where a mentor and mentee belong to different groups (i.e., a senior from a majority group and a junior from a minority group).

Alternatively, organisations can also implement a 'reverse mentoring programme' where a talented junior employee from a minority group mentors a senior leader from a majority group. Research has shown that such programmes might create more equality in the relationship, 'enabling greater potential for friendship and a far greater impact on unconscious bias.
(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238318970_Mentoring_global_female_managers_in_the_global_marketplace_Traditional_reverse_and_reciprocal_mentoring)

Having such a relationship is seen as a key factor in making contact hypothesis work and reducing implicit bias.

Mentoring is also seen as an important method for supporting minorities within organisations.

However, to assess the effectiveness of these interventions, organisations must have robust training evaluation programmes in place.

4. Using motivation to change responses to an out-group

Some individuals are inherently driven or motivated to suppress or control bias. They consider it as being important to their moral sense of self. Others might be motivated by external factors to suppress their biases – for these individuals, 'suppressing bias is not a personal value' but they mould their behaviours to conform to social or organisational norms. Where internal motivation to suppress bias is low, individuals need to put in much more effort to suppress their feelings or beliefs.

In a study by Legault *et al* (2011) researchers found that participants who were primed with a brochure which encouraged them to use internal motivation to reduce implicit bias were successful in doing so when compared to the group who were given a 'controlling-brochure condition' which urged participants to reduce their prejudice to comply with social norms.[i] This study implies that having mandatory training sessions to tackle unconscious bias may not be effective in reducing prejudice of trainees – what is important is giving staff the autonomy to choose if they want to be part of the training programme.

Richeson in 2004 considered if a 'colour-blind' approach or a 'multicultural approach' was effective in reducing bias. According to Richeson, 'colour-blind perspectives advocate reducing, eliminating, and ignoring category memberships, whereas multiculturalism advocates considering, and sometimes emphasizing and celebrating, category memberships.'[i]

As part of Richeson's experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either a colour-blind or a multicultural group in which they had to read one-page statement on the respective ideology. They were then asked to complete two tasks designed to measure the participant's agreements with the ideology. IAT results of the participants after the experiment found that although there was pro-white bias amongst all participants irrespective of the group they belonged to, participants exposed to the colour-blind ideology demonstrated a larger pro-white bias compared to the participants in the multicultural ideology condition.

However, there is some concern that this test might have actually increased bias amongst some participants where there wasn't any by making race salient. This could be one of the reasons why some organisations are consciously moving away from setting up employee networks based on the nine protected characteristics. Instead, they now have a single forum where all employees are encouraged to join and share ideas.

A good example of this is TSB's 'Inclusion Network' which is open to all employees and operates on three key themes, which the bank believes are relevant to every TSB Partner – *career development*, *work-life balance* and *inclusive culture*. Additionally, the network consists of five affinity groups (gender, disability, ethnicity, LGBT, and new to TSB), and each of the affinity groups has an executive sponsor who gives voice to the group and champions their cause, while ensuring that their work is always on the business agenda. You can find the full case study on the IPA website.

Policy implications

Organisations that have mandatory training programmes to address diversity issues or to tackle unconscious bias should rethink their approach.

As studies have shown, approaches to equality and diversity training where employees do not have the autonomy to choose whether to be part of the training programme or not can have unintended consequences.

It is extremely important that employees are given the autonomy - within a safe environment - to make themselves aware of their own biases and how to manage them.

Organisations could adopt an alternative approach by first introducing an optional training programme on unconscious bias and make it mandatory on the back of positive feedback from trainees.

Employees should also be encouraged to assist organisations in coming up with 'bias mitigating strategies.' They should be actively involved in helping their organisation put in the right structures in place to tackle unconscious behaviours.

5. Encouraging people to take responsibility for their implicit biases

Rather than just being passive observers, employees should be encouraged to tackle their own implicit biases by enacting strategies to reduce them. This can potentially be a very powerful technique to control or reduce bias as it puts the 'observer' in a position where they have to consciously choose a bias control method when they are in a situation where they know that they have a strong bias. However, on the other hand, there are concerns that, conscious control of implicit bias could increase the attention to the characteristic resulting in an increased implicit bias when the purpose of the process is to control the bias.

Policy implications

Training people in unconscious bias can be most effective where they are actively involved in coming up with strategies to address their own biases rather than being a passive observer.

Encouraging people to assess candidates as individuals and to ignore social characteristics or dispositional traits can be a simple and easy method to control bias during recruitment and selection procedures.

When individuals are given the autonomy and feel empowered to control their own biases, there is a higher chance of training programmes on unconscious bias being effective.

Organisations can take a variety of approaches to tackle unconscious bias in the workplace. But the important first step – as discussed in the previous chapter – is to have the structures and policies in place to recognise and address unconscious behaviours.

Training on unconscious bias does not have to be a passive activity and could be a combination of the techniques mentioned in this chapter. Most importantly, organisations must ensure that no one group is stigmatised in the process and that employees have some autonomy in choosing whether to be part of a training programme, and must be encouraged to make themselves aware of their own biases and come up with bias-mitigating strategies.

Conclusion

It is extremely important that organisations understand the true impact of unconscious behaviours. We are all unconsciously biased and, as we have discussed in the report, these behaviours come out situationally.

Employers play an important role in helping raise the awareness of unconscious bias amongst their staff and shouldn't shy away from doing so. However, care must be taken so that no one group feels stigmatised or alienated by the process.

However, the most important aspect of a successful training programme on unconscious bias is to first re-align the culture of the organisation so that employees feel safe to recognise their own biases, come up with bias mitigating strategies and have the opportunity to put into practice learnings from the training programme. Organisations need 'fertile soil' in place before the 'seeds' of training interventions can grow.

The senior leadership team needs to take a leading role by being part of the training programme themselves and help create a culture where everyone is treated fairly and equally.

In this report, we highlighted various techniques to reduce the impact of unconscious behaviours, however, trainees do not have to be passive observers through the process. Apart from encouraging employees to raise awareness of their own biases, they should also be given the opportunity to come up with bias mitigating strategies along with the organisation.

Training on its own will not solve all organisational issues related to diversity and inclusion – but training in conjunction with an organisational culture that empowers staff to recognise and address their own biases is a positive step forward.

St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is based in Tooting in the London Borough of Wandsworth, and serves a population of 1.3 million across southwest London. A large number of services, such as cardiothoracic medicine and surgery, neurosciences and renal transplantation, also cover significant populations from Surrey and Sussex, totalling about 3.5 million people.

The trust employs 8,500 staff at various sites to deliver its services.

Impact of unconscious bias at the Trust

St. George's Trust has a clear vision to provide quality healthcare services to everyone who needs them, and to make sure that staff are competent, equal and happy in their work. The Trust works hard to ensure that its services 'promote equality of opportunity, equality of access, and are non-discriminatory to both staff and service users.'

The Trust ensures that the diversity of their staff reflects the diversity that surrounds them. As Jenni Doman, Estates and Facilities Manager explained: *"There is a huge variety of different backgrounds of staff that work with us, which makes for a very good workforce in relation to what we do for a living and the people we service in the local community. Our staff is very much a reflection of the communities we serve."* However, evidence from sources like the NHS Staff Survey show that the experiences of black and minority ethnic staff is not as positive as it is for white members of staff. Wendy Brewer, Director of Workforce and Organisational Development at St. George's believes that unconscious bias might have a role to play in explaining these differential experiences. As she described: *"I think it is important for us to tackle all kinds of biases, conscious and unconscious, and I think it is essential to ensure that all our staff are able to flourish to the best of their abilities irrespective of their backgrounds."*

Wendy Brewer and her colleagues who were interviewed for the case study firmly believe that unconscious bias has a direct impact on Trust outcomes. Wendy described how, if not addressed effectively, unconscious bias could have a negative impact on staff engagement, and overall performance of the Trust. She highlights the growing body of research which shows that staff engagement is crucial to positive outcomes for patients and staff. For instance, Trusts which have higher staff engagement report lower hospital mortality rates and increased patient satisfaction. Staff engagement is also linked to lower absence rates amongst staff and increased health and well-being at work.

> *"Everybody has got a bias. It is about making yourself aware of the biases you have, understanding how you can manage them, how it could transform to your everyday work and how it effects the people around* you*….This isn't just about staff. It is about the way we treat patients, relatives, visitors and interactions out in the community."*
>
> **Stephanie Sweeney, Head of Nursing**

Jane Attrill, Head of Rehabilitation Services explained how unconscious bias could impact the kind of treatment and care received by patients and how different staff groups interact with each other. For Lynette Clarke, Renal Service Manager at the Trust, unconscious bias has an impact on how the Trust recruits staff. Jenni Doman explained why it is important to make staff realise that due to biases people have *"everybody is not treated the same…"* and that *"it is important to recognise differences and respect their diversity."*

Training on unconscious bias

In 2014, the Trust commissioned Dr Jude Smith Rachele of Abundant Sun to carry out a training programme for their staff on unconscious bias. Jude runs highly interactive and 'entertaining' workshops, which include concrete action planning to help staff take back the learning to their current roles. As she described: *"We have a lot of fun - that is the most important thing. It is a lot of honesty from our part, sharing the imperfections and biases we have as professionals….It is injecting an element of realism so that people feel safe to be honest and to take the time to explore the issue and how it impacts them."*

For Jude, the first step in tackling unconscious bias is making people more aware of their own biases. As she explained: *"The impact of bias is too detrimental. What we [Abundant Sun] do is very much designed to help increase the awareness of the unconscious behaviours in relation to discrimination, bullying, harassment and stereotyping and create a more inclusive work environment where people can thrive."*

The Trust carried out a pilot session to introduce some staff members to the training programme. As initial feedback from the training session was very positive, they decided to roll it out to the senior management team, Band 8s and Band 7s. Although some staff members were initially apprehensive about being part of the session, the openness and 'vibrancy' of the trainer [Jude] put them at ease and helped create a safe environment where views could be shared and discussed. As Jane Attrill explained: *"It [training programme] helped to bring out people's personal experiences, which was very helpful because we all have things in our own lives that people don't know the impact of or how they impact them at work. The trainer was very good at bringing these things to the fore."*

The training session itself was very illustrative, with a lot of discussion amongst group members on what they thought of the individuals portrayed in each of the images. As Jane Attrill explained: *"It was very pictorial. We did a kind of warm up exercise, with some photographs and I think it was to do with people who you felt like you could trust. We did this individually and as a group. But when the facts about the people in the pictures were revealed, there were some in the room who were visibly shocked and who found it difficult to move on from the stance they had taken based on the way the people in the photograph looked."*

This was echoed by some of the interviewees who said that although there were no follow-up training sessions, they felt that the training programme had a long-term impact on their thinking due to the trainer and the nature of its delivery. As Lynn Clarke described: *"People say, 'no I am not prejudiced, I have no biases' – but by the end of the session they realise that they are."*

Impact of the training programme

The immediate feedback from the training programme has been very positive.

Senior managers at the Trust are seen talking about the training programme and how it has made them aware of their biases. Those that have not had the opportunity to be part of the session are keen to go in it. As Lynn Clarke explained: *"The training programme helps you to stop and think. When you are dealing with a particular situation, it is not about making an assumption that somebody is going to react in this way because they look this way, dress this way or due to their gender – it does make you take stock and think."*

For Jenni Doman, the training session was an opportunity to take a step back from day to day management activities and *"think quite deeply about your own feelings and how it impacts you at work."* She further added that in her experience, since the training programme, there have been

distinct changes in behaviours of some of those that have been part of the session, how they manage their teams and day to day business activities. As she described: *"It doesn't matter how good a manger you are, you have to sometimes sit back and have that time to just think about things. But we don't necessarily always have time to do that. But the training programme has given us the opportunity to do so despite our busy schedules. I now think about how I am managing things differently given the learning from the training session."*

This was echoed by some of her colleagues who said that the training programme helped them to be analytical and *"think twice"* before they make any decisions and ensure that they are creating a transparent, inclusive and consistent work environment. As Subi Menon, Matron at the Trust explained: *"It has definitely made people think. I am not part of the recruitment process, but whenever my ward managers recruits someone new, I can talk to her about it and understand how the decision was made. So there is a thought process involved."*

However, the Trust currently does not have a system in place to 'measure' the direct impact of the training programme. Jenni Doman believes that it would be difficult to 'quantify' the effect of such programmes *"unless you are shadowing the person [who has been part of the training session] day in and day out and see how they behave and whether there have been any changes from before."* She further added that a ward or a department could be performing well due to a number of factors and it would be difficult to link the positive outcomes just to the training programme.

This view was echoed by Wendy Brewer, who said that although feedback from the training programme has been very positive, the Trust cannot see a connection yet in terms of the training session and change in outcomes for individuals. As she explained: *"I can't see that it is impacting on our employee relations statistics for example. While I can say that I have observed and heard senior managers talk more about how they are aware of the impact on other people, it is still very early days."* Wendy believes that it is essential that the Trust establish an 'evaluative link' between people who have been on the training programme and what their outcomes are in their areas to understand its impact.

Nevertheless, interviewees firmly believe that the training programme is a contributing factor to making things better at the Trust and reinforce its values and vision. But, there is a feeling amongst those that participated in the case study that unless everyone at the Trust has had the opportunity to be part of the programme, it would be difficult to recognise the extent to which the session has made a difference to staff behaviours and decision-making skills. As Jane Attrill explained: *"In my staff group, I can't think of any examples where I'd be able to say to you quite clearly that training has made a difference…but I will qualify that by saying I don't know how many people have attended it….But in terms of a contributing factor to general improvement in terms of Trust values, training has been very helpful."*

Strengthening the training programme

Although training on unconscious bias at the Trust is in its early stages, staff have suggested various ways in which it could be strengthened further.

The Trust presently carries out training for senior management teams, Band 8s and Band 7s, however, staff we interviewed for the case study firmly believe that, to be truly effective, the training programme should be made available to **all staff** irrespective of seniority and staff groups. As Lynn Clarke explained: *"Gaps to me [in terms of the training programme] is to ensure that everybody goes on it. Everyone from the executive and management team right the way down to porters, cleaning and catering staff….This is the only way you are going to get everybody singing*

from the same hymn sheet." Some members further added that if and when the Trust decides to roll out the training programme to all staff, the content will have to be tailored to the requirements of the various bands, staff groups and their roles.

Presently, staff at the Trust can choose whether to be part of the training programme. However, the overwhelming view of those we interviewed for the case study is that the training has to be made **mandatory**. As Wendy Brewer explained: *"There are couple of things we need to do to strengthen the programme further. Firstly, it needs to be made mandatory."*

Some staff members said that just training on unconscious bias would not change some of the strong views people have. Stephanie Sweeney believes that the training programme should add to the **vision** and overall organisational and governance plan of the Trust while providing staff with forums to discuss *"the big questions and help tackle some very specific behaviours if they are biased."* As she described: *"I think we need to probably look at how we can live feedback on the course and devise a way of capturing how we could put that into practice….I think it would be good if we are able to have a seminar session for a couple of hours or a roundtable with HR and share experiences and discuss what we have done that might help to get it [the training session] out there."* This view was echoed by Jenni Doman who said that HR need to take an active role in evaluating the training programme and ensure that it doesn't become a *"tick box exercise"* or *"just another training course."* As she described: *"HR team can get back [to the trainees] and say 'right, so you have had your training on unconscious bias, what have you done differently, give us some examples' and then feed it back in some kind of review through the managers in relation to leadership development*."

There were also suggestions from staff members that to maintain momentum and reinforce the learning, the training programme needs to be **ongoing** and not just a one off exercise. As Tsering Chodon, Ward Manager at the Trust explained: *"I think we should have regular training sessions because we went in [to the training programme] as clean slates and now something's drawn on it. We need to come back in six to seven months' time to see how much has been retained on the slate and how much has gone into practice. So feedback from members who attended the training session on how they have done and how staff turnover in that department has been since the training session would certainly help."*

Finally, some of the staff members felt that the Trust could make better use of their internal communication systems to **publicise** the training programme more. Although the Trust sends out regular emails to staff about dates for upcoming training sessions, some staff members feel that sharing information about who has already been part of the session would encourage others to willingly take part.

Challenges

There is a recognition across the Trust that there will continue to be significant changes over the next few years which could have an impact on the effectiveness of the training programme.

Cuts to the Trust's budget has meant that staff are currently facing various service pressures. As Jenni Doman explained: "*In a state of financial anxiety, you are not always going to get very interesting returns. You will get people that are not bothered to do this. You can only encourage them to be part of it [training programme] but if people don't want to do it, you can't force them."* Stephanie Sweeney echoed this view by saying pressures on staff keep going up as the population around them keeps rising and that unless the training programme becomes part of everyone's Personal Development Plan (PDP), it would be difficult to make it mandatory for all. As one of the interviewees explained: *"I think it is difficult with mandatory training because there is so much that*

needs to be done each day at the Trust. Obviously for clinical colleagues, there is also clinical training and developments in addition to the non-clinical and professional and leadership development."

However, Jenni Doman thinks that by giving enough notice to staff about potential training dates, it would help the managers in organising their staff and help set some time aside in their rotas if they wish to go on the training programme. As she described: *"Our clinics are booked 10-12 weeks in advance and we cannot cancel clinics and take people out to go on training…. Certainly my feedback was that we need to have more notice or have dates booked through the year. So in all departments and services, they could decide that a number of their staff could go and they could plan when people are going to be absent in order to attend the training."*

Jane Attrill further added that being able to run training programmes in venues other than St. George's would make it easier for staff that are not based at the Trust to attend the training sessions.

Role of leadership and line managers

Wendy Brewer, Director of Workforce and Organisational Development at the Trust firmly believes that the senior leadership team plays a fundamental role in setting the tone and embedding the learning from the training programme within the organisation. As she described: *"If leaders don't change the way we behave, there is no point in running training programmes."* This view was echoed by those that were interviewed for the case study. Leaders and the senior management team at the Trust have already been part of the training programme and are seen to be leading by example. Some leaders also take an active role in publicising the training programme and encourage their team members to attend the sessions.

Line managers at the Trust also play an important role in creating work environments where everyone is treated fairly and consistently. Senior managers interviewed for the case study felt that the Trust made the right decision in commissioning a training programme to address unconscious bias and that it is important they had the right tools in place to make themselves and their team members aware of the biases they have.

Key learnings

Training on unconscious bias has potential to change behaviours if it is delivered in the right way and has inclusion for all staff and not just seen as a tick box exercise.

Training in isolation with no strategic vision, no sustainable plan, and no engagement from leadership will not change behaviours.

The trainer is key to an engaging training session. It is essential that the trainer creates an environment where individuals feel safe to share their views and opinions.

Evaluating the training programme, in terms of its impact is crucial. Staff who have been part of the training programme need to be invited to take part in a forum to share learnings and discuss how the session has helped them in their current role, and what they are doing differently from before.

Leadership and the management team need to lead by example and take an active role in embedding the learning from the training programme within the organisation.

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