



World Health
Organization

#Ready4Response

Tier 2: Ready4Response

Module 3: Response core skills

Working in a team: Unconscious bias

Unit 3D

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#Ready₄Response



Hi. Let's continue together this journey!

INTRODUCTION

In a response you may find you are working with people from different organizations and backgrounds.

We all have pre-conceived ideas about people. Recognizing and mitigating these can help us work better as a team.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- define unconscious bias;
- describe how unconscious bias might affect you; and
- explain how you can recognize and mitigate unconscious bias.

REFLECTION

When most people think of bias, they think of a negative action taken deliberately. But there are unconscious or implicit biases¹ that can affect your behavior or decisions without you realizing it.

Unconscious biases are often based on mistaken, inaccurate, or incomplete information.

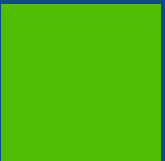
¹Catalyst. *What is Unconscious Bias?* New York: Catalyst, December 11, 2014.
<https://catalyst.org/research/infographic-what-is-unconscious-bias/>



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These biases can have a significant impact on workplaces and in the response, shaping who gets recruited, included and promoted. Having an unconscious bias doesn't make you a bad person—it just means you are human.

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UNCONSCIOUS BIAS



is an automatic response (sub- or unconscious) helping us to make quick judgements of people and situations.



It is mainly influenced by our background and cultural and personal experiences.

Even people who sincerely believe in equality can act in a biased manner involuntarily.

Everyone has unconscious biases unique to themselves. The aim is to know them and mitigate against them.

Unconscious bias in the workplace can mean:

- Talented people are left out of your workforce or not allowed equal opportunity for development and career progression.
- Diverse voices aren't heard in meetings and decisions can be impaired.
- Your culture is not genuinely demonstrating inclusive workplace principles.
- Employees are not able to fully contribute to your organization and problems that need to be solved.
- Creativity and productivity of your team or organization may be compromised.



Common unconscious biases:

- Gender
- Age
- Weight
- Skin colour
- Physical disability
- Job title
- Level of education
- Sexuality
- Accent
- Social status
- Religion
- Ethnicity
- Nationality.



It's possible, however, to interrupt bias. The first step is awareness. Below are the most common types of unconscious bias, along with tactics you can use to ensure workplace decisions aren't being guided by them.

1. Affinity bias: Also called like-likes-like, this bias refers to our tendency to gravitate toward people similar to ourselves; that might mean someone who shares the same race, gender, age, or educational background. It could mean we give people who are like us better tasks or more opportunities.

2. Ageism: Discriminating against someone on the basis of their age. Ageism tends to affect women more than men, and starts at younger ages.

3. Attribution bias: Because some people see women as less competent than men, they may undervalue their accomplishments and overvalue their mistakes.

1. <https://catalyst.org/solution/managing-affinity-bias-knowledge-burst/>
2. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/gendered-ageism-trend-brief/>
3. <https://leanin.org/education/what-is-attribution-bias>.



4. Beauty bias: Judging people, especially women, based on how attractive you think they are is called beauty bias. People perceived as attractive can be viewed more positively and treated more favorably.

5. Confirmation bias: Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to look for or favor information that confirms beliefs we already hold.

6. Conformity bias: Very common in group settings, this type of bias occurs when your views are swayed or influenced by the views of others. This is similar to groupthink.

7. The contrast effect: This bias refers to evaluating the performance of one person in contrast to another because you experienced the individuals either simultaneously or in close succession.

4. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/how-to-avoid-beauty-bias-when-hiring.aspx>

5. https://www.sciencedaily.com/terms/confirmation_bias.htm

6. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaagarwaleurope/2018/10/19/how-can-bias-during-interviews-affect-recruitment-in-your-organisation/#457bc511951a>

7. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaagarwaleurope/2018/10/19/how-can-bias-during-interviews-affect-recruitment-in-your-organisation/#457bc511951a>;

<https://www.catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-hr-experts-eliminating-gender-bias-from-the-recruitment-process/>



8. Gender bias: Preferring one gender over another or assuming that one gender is better for the job.

9. The halo/horns effect: The tendency to put someone on a pedestal or think more highly of them after learning something impressive about them, or conversely, perceiving someone negatively after learning something unfavorable about them.

10. Name bias: When you judge a person based on their name and perceived background. This is especially important when reviewing resumes.

11. Weight bias: Judging a person negatively because they are larger or heavier than average.

Now that you are aware of the different kinds of unconscious bias, you can start to put systems in place to prevent bias from interfering in your workplace decisions.



8. <https://catalyst.org/research/break-the-cycle-managers-eliminating-gender-bias-in-development-opportunities/>

9. <https://www.trakstar.com/blog-post/identifying-the-halohorns-effect-with-a-performance-review-system/>

10. <https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/unconscious-bias-examples>

11. <https://www.obesityaction.org/action-through-advocacy/weight-bias/>

How to address this:

- **Focus on seeing people as individuals.** Rather than focusing on stereotypes to define people, spend time considering them on a more personal, individual level.
- **Work on consciously changing your stereotypes.** If you do recognize that your response to a person might be rooted in biases or stereotypes, make an effort to consciously adjust your response.
- **Take time to pause and reflect.** In order to reduce reflexive reactions, take time to reflect on potential biases and replace them with positive examples of the stereotyped group.



- **Adjust your perspective.** Try seeing things from another person's point of view. How would you respond if you were in the same position? What factors might contribute to how a person acts in a particular setting or situation?
- **Increase your exposure.** Spend more time with people of different racial backgrounds. Learn about their culture by attending community events or exhibits.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Try meditation, yoga, or focused breathing to increase mindfulness and become more aware of your thoughts and actions.
- **Take an online test to reveal the unconscious biases you may have.**
 - Example: Project Implicit ®
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>



Unconscious bias:

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Investigate and acknowledge unconscious bias.
- Be wary of first impressions – avoid quick judgements about people.
- Aim to learn more about stereotypes.
- Try to know and mitigate your own unconscious biases.
- Don't be afraid to try new things.



SUMMARY

- We all have unconscious biases.
- Exploring our own biases can help us identify and address them.
- Being more self aware will help us work more effectively in teams.

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Most people experience some level of unconscious bias based on our experiences.

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FOLLOW-UP TASK

1. Read the article in the resources section.
2. Spend 10 minutes reflecting on your own biases.
3. Make a note in your journal.

Additional resources

- Information about unconscious bias

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/workshop-gender-unconscious-bias-and-inclusive-management>