9

Cognitive Biases in Recruitment, Selection, and Promotion: The Risk of Subconscious Discrimination

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9.1 Introduction

The topic of workplace diversity has received renewed interest in both the academic literature and popular press in recent years. A growing body of research documented in the academic literature suggests that a diverse workforce provides a number of benefits for meeting the challenges brought about by the modern economic market. Competitive, dynamic, and increasingly global markets demand high levels of adaptability and innovation, which a heterogeneous workforce is better suited to provide, given its broader range of experience and knowledge (see Cox and Blake 1991; Milliken and Martins 1996; Nemeth and Wachtler 1983; Shaw and Barrett-Power 1998; Wright et al. 1995).

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Despite the documented benefits of workplace diversity, however, progress in achieving it has been slow. A recent review of the proportion of women on UK Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) boards, for example, identified that growth has stagnated (Sealy et al. 2016). This is notwithstanding the issue having been a regular topic of debate in the mainstream press and political arenas over recent years. Similarly, statistics suggest a similar pattern in the US, with the proportion of white female managers at US commercial banks having dropped from 39% to 35% between 2003 and 2014 (Dobbin and Kalev 2016), despite the industry having been under the spotlight in terms of gender diversity.

One potential explanation for this apparent disparity is that the gender and race bias which can lead to discrimination in society today is *largely implicit* (Bartlett 2009, p. 1893). It is argued that discrimination has become *invisible, deep, and pervasive* (Bartlett 2009, p. 1895), whilst explicit negative attitudes towards minority groups may have diminished over time (Dovidio 2001). In this case, it is plausible to consider that levels of discrimination in the workplace may not have changed significantly, but the underlying causes of it have simply become less apparent. The implications of such a shift are significant, since the actions required to address discrimination caused by implicit bias are substantially different to those required to address explicit biases on which attention has historically focused. Consistent with the theme of this book, it can be argued that it is now the 'hidden elements' that we must pay greater attention to if we are to make significant improvements in diversity and inclusion. Specifically, this chapter looks at the implicit biases, which can lead to discrimination in the workplace; factors inherent to the decision-making processes affecting employees in the workplace. Therefore, the 'hidden' yet ubiquitous component in this case is the subconscious cognitive processing, which can lead to discrimination, without even the perpetrator or victim's conscious awareness.

Greenwald and Krieger (2006), for example, highlighted that a shift from explicit to implicit discrimination causes a challenge for the legal system since discrimination law and doctrine is based on the assumption that, *barring insanity or mental incompetence, human actors are guided by their avowed (explicit) beliefs, attitudes, and intentions* (Greenwald and Krieger 2006, p. 951). In other words, can someone be held account-

able for something they did not realise they were doing? Biancotti et al. (2013) argue that although involuntary behaviour cannot be punished, regulators can *work on debunking the underlying, unconscious assumptions, much in the same spirit of mandating tobacco companies to print health warnings on cigarette packs in order to make smokers more aware of the consequences of their actions* (p. 7).

Further exacerbating the challenge is the belief that the effects of implicit biases (also termed cognitive biases; see Kahneman 2011) are generally not mitigated by awareness of their existence. Given that they operate at an automatic, subconscious level, being made aware that our judgements can be influenced by such biases appears to do little to improve the quality of judgements or decisions at either the individual or the organisational level (Kahneman et al. 2011). Consequently, if lack of diversity is underpinned largely by biases that are implicit, interventions that operate at the level of explicit attitudes and beliefs are likely to be of limited value. This includes traditional diversity training programmes aimed at raising conscious awareness of the importance of avoiding discrimination, about the issues surrounding lack of diversity, or about the benefits brought about by diversity. As articulated by Dobbin and Kalev (2016), *you can't just outlaw bias… The positive effects of diversity training rarely last beyond a day or two, and a number of studies suggest that it can activate bias or spark a backlash. Nonetheless, nearly half of midsize companies use it, as do nearly all the Fortune 500* (p. 4).

Instead, as this chapter outlines, greater attention needs to be paid to the decision-making process itself, in order to unearth the subtler (and potentially job irrelevant) factors that influence selection, recruitment, and promotion decisions. Attention also needs to shift towards addressing the cultural, environmental, or systemic factors which might trigger or maintain implicit biases, and this needs to be not only at the individual level but also team and organisational levels. Organisational culture has been recognised as playing a particularly important role in sustaining implicit, cognitive biases, given the normative influence that culture has on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Pless and Maak 2004; Wallace and Pillans 2016).

This chapter provides an evaluation of the existing academic literature to outline the relevant theories, research, and findings relating to

implicit biases; the ways in which they can lead to discrimination; and any emerging evidence regarding how they might be mitigated. The chapter concludes with recommendations for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

9.2 What Are Implicit Biases and How Might They Lead to Discrimination?

Implicit cognition suggests that *actors do not always have conscious, intentional control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgment that motivate their actions* (Greenwald and Krieger 2006, p. 946). Also known as heuristics, these 'mental shortcuts' perform an essential role in simplifying everyday human cognitive processing. Kahneman (2011, p. 98) defines a heuristic as *a simple procedure that helps find adequate, though often imperfect, answers to difficult questions.* Given the need to make numerous, rapid decisions during the course of any given day, we adopt heuristics as implicit 'rules of thumb', to avoid being overwhelmed by the vast amounts of data available to our senses. Although typically useful, heuristics can result in oversimplified, inaccurate, and biased decisions or judgements. In the case of diversity, not only have implicit biases been found to predict discriminatory behaviour but implicit bias measures are also significantly more effective than explicit bias measures in predicting behavioural indicators of discrimination (Greenwald and Krieger 2006).

Implicit biases consist of two elements: implicit attitudes and implicit stereotypes. Implicit attitudes are defined as *introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects* (Greenwald and Banaji 1995, p. 8). An example is a voter making their decision based not on an explicit consideration of a particular party's policies and proposals, but instead unconsciously guided by irrelevant factors such as physical similarities to themselves. As highlighted by Greenwald and Banaji, implicit attitudes are particularly interesting (and, indeed problematic) when they differ from the explicit attitudes towards the same

object, resulting in a dissociation between implicit and explicit attitudes. Implicit stereotypes, on the other hand, are described as *the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate attributions of qualities to members of a social category* (p. 15).

Implicit biases can lead to discrimination in any recruitment, selection, promotion, and reward process, which involves a human judgement or decision-making component. In selection and assessment, for example, implicit biases interfere with the main goal of the process; to evaluate the extent to which a candidate possesses or can demonstrate key characteristics, which are *relevant* for performance in the role being recruited for. Rivera (2012) argues that, in order to understand what is really going on in recruitment procedures, greater attention needs to be paid to the decision-making process itself, to reveal the subtle factors that contribute to employers' decisions. Given that the predictive validity of commonly used selection and assessment methods varies greatly with CVs and assessment centres typically providing predictive validity of around 0.4, approximating to a 40% chance that the selection method will predict subsequent performance on the job (Pilbeam and Corbridge 2006). There remains a large proportion of unexplained variance in many modern selection processes. Furthermore, some of the selection instruments that demonstrate higher predictive validity overall, display considerable ethnic subgroup differences in test performance (De Soete et al. 2012), highlighting the existence of potential discrimination.

9.3 How Do Implicit Biases Typically Manifest in Recruitment, Selection, Promotion, and Reward Decisions?

9.3.1 Stereotyping

One of the most commonly known implicit biases affecting recruitment decisions is stereotyping. Stereotypes are categories that encapsulate what a person believes about, and expects from, other people (Bartlett 2009). Stereotypes not only influence the interpretation and memory of

a victim of stereotyping's behaviour but also actual behaviour towards them (Purkiss et al. 2006). The salience of stereotypes is influenced by the context. For example, a black woman's gender will be more salient in a group of men, whilst her race will be more salient in a group of white women (Mitchell et al. 2003). Stereotypes can be problematic because they entail gross assumptions and over extensions, leading to assumptions that members of a particular category are more alike than they really are, and that members of different categories are more dissimilar than they really are. Such is the implicit nature of the bias, research has shown that stereotyping can lead to racial discrimination even when the person making the judgement avows to be completely indifferent to racial stereotypes (Dasgupta et al. 2000).

A simple yet striking example of stereotyping comes from a US study in which researchers sent around 5000 resumes in response to job adverts, each with a randomly assigned a stereotypically African-American- or White-sounding name. Resumes for candidates with stereotypically white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks for interviews, and callbacks are more responsive to resume quality for stereotypically white-sounding names than for African-American ones. This bias persisted regardless of occupation, industry, or employer size (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004). This phenomenon has been replicated in a host of different contexts, including bias against immigrant applicants (Oreopoulos 2011). Oreopoulos identified discrimination across a variety of occupations towards applicants with foreign experience or those with Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, and Greek names compared with English names. Although recruiters justified their decisions based on language skill concerns, the study demonstrated that listing language fluency, multinational firm experience, or education from highly selective schools did nothing to diminish the effect. Similarly, King et al. (2006) asked 155 white male participants to judge individuals' suitability for jobs based on fictitious resumes, which were designed to be of varying quality. The results revealed that Asian American individuals were evaluated highly for high-status jobs, regardless of resume quality. In contrast, black applicants were evaluated negatively even with a strong resume, a finding that appeared to be underpinned by occupational stereotypes.

A recent study, however, by Deming et al. (2016) found no consistent pattern of differences in callback rates by race, in contrast to the findings of Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004), Oreopoulos (2011), and King et al. (2006). They cite a number of possible reasons, including differing study settings, time periods, labour markets, application processes, employers, and job quality, suggesting that the effect may be more nuanced than initially assumed. Indeed, in their original study, Bertrand and Mullainathan acknowledge that the names used for the resumes may not just evoke race-related stereotypes but may also evoke stereotypes relating to social background and status. However, either way, this reflects discrimination based on factors that are irrelevant to potential job performance.

Illustrating the contextual nature of stereotypes, Booth and Leigh (2010) explored gender discrimination in response to fake CVs for entry-level jobs, but in occupations that are female dominated in Australia, the country research was conducted (these were 'wait-staff', data-entry staff, customer service staff, and sales staff). Averaging across all jobs, they observed substantial discrimination against male candidates, particularly for 'wait-staff' and data entry staff, which were the two occupations with the highest proportion of female employees. As a result, they concluded that the typical male applicant would have to submit 28% more applications in order to receive the same number of callbacks for entry-level jobs that are female dominated. However, in a subsequent meta-analysis of gender stereotypes and bias in experimental simulations of employment decision-making, Koch et al. (2015) identified that men were favoured for male-dominated jobs, whereas no strong preference for either gender was found for female-dominated jobs.

In an applied context, Goldin and Rouse (2000) took advantage of a change in the way symphony orchestras in the US recruit musicians, having moved to blind auditions with a screen to conceal the identity of the candidate from the jury during the 1970s and 1980s. Goldin and Rouse discovered that the screen increases the probability a woman will be advanced out of preliminary rounds by 50%. They estimated the switch to blind auditions as explaining between 30% and 55% of the increase in the proportion of females among new hires since 1970, when less than 5% of all players in top five US symphony orchestras were female, to 25% today.

9.3.2 Stereotype Threat

An additional factor complicating the impact of stereotypes is that stereotypes not only influence outcomes via their impact on decision-makers' judgements but also impact on candidates' actual performance due to the impact of the stereotype threat phenomenon. A concept initially introduced by Steele and Aronson (1995), it acknowledges that certain settings or situations contain subtle reminders of stereotypes that presume certain groups are less capable. As articulated by Schmader (2010), it describes the finding that anyone can exhibit impaired performance when reminded of ways in which they might be negatively stereotyped. This threat in the air (Schmader 2010) can trigger a range of attentional, physiological, cognitive, affective, and motivational processes (see Casad and Merritt 2014), such as inferiority, anxiety, and a concern about confirming these stereotypes, which impairs the individual's ability to perform to their full capability. Stereotype threat has been identified to operate in relation to stereotypes associated with gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, across and in a broad range of settings including academia, athletics, and the workplace (Steele et al. 2002).

Stereotype threat is particularly likely to be triggered in stereotypically masculine fields such as finance and banking, with research demonstrating that stereotype threat among women in management and accounting leads to negative job attitudes and intentions to quit via its effects on identity separation or the perception that one's gender identity is incompatible with one's work identity (Von Hippel et al. 2015). As a result, a catch-22 situation is created, as recognised by the authors: *…since recruitment and retention of women into fields where they have been historically underrepresented is key to achieving the "critical mass" of women necessary to reduce perceptions of tokenism as well as stereotyping and devaluing of women* (p. 405).

Stereotype threat is also of relevance to promotion and reward decisions since it is a condition for the effect to emerge, that individuals must identify with and care about their performance in the domain (Roberson et al. 2003). Ironically, this means that the motivated and talented may be most vulnerable to stereotype threat (Aronson et al. 1998). Roberson

et al. (2003) found that the experience of stereotype threat influenced the way that African American managers in US organisations interpreted and responded to performance feedback. They found that the experience of stereotype threat, the risk of which was increased for individuals who were the only African American in their work group, was associated with increased use of an indirect, monitoring strategy for seeking feedback and a greater degree of feedback discounting. The indirect, monitoring strategy of feedback seeking results in feedback that is more subject to misinterpretation and is less useful than direct inquiry for performance improvements (Ashford and Cummings 1983; Ashford and Tsui 1991; Roberson et al. 2003). Discounting or questioning the veracity of feedback makes it less likely that an individual will act upon it (Cohen et al. 1999; Cohen and Steele 2002), and if employees from minority groups do not use feedback as effectively as non-minority group employees, their chances for advancement and success will be hindered (Crocker et al. 1991). Given the importance of receiving critical feedback for development and career progression, research supports the value of employers being trained in providing 'wise feedback', which aims to remove ambiguity regarding the motive for the feedback so that members of minority groups do not attribute critical feedback to factors relating to their gender or race (Yeager et al. 2014).

In addition, the experience of stereotype threat has been shown to limit an individual's willingness to embrace challenges since any resulting failure could be interpreted as evidence supporting the stereotype (Steele 1997). This may include the type of stretch assignment which might subsequently be used as evidence in cases for a promotion or pay increase. As recognised by Casad and Bryant (2016), repeated experiences of stereotype threat can impact detrimentally on career aspirations, as the experience of threat and perceived incompetence leads individuals to assume that they have reduced chances of success in that environment (Steele 1997; Davies et al. 2005). Again, reduced career aspirations in response to stereotype threat is likely to exacerbate and perpetuate the diversity problems within fields underrepresented by minorities (Murphy et al. 2007; Koenig et al. 2011).

9.3.3 Selective Attention and Confirmation Bias

So pervasive is the impact of stereotypes that they influence what we pay attention to and the information we subsequently process. Where this becomes particularly evident, and problematic, is in the face-to-face selection interview. Although interviews remain the frequently used selection tool in recruitment, evidence denoting their proneness to biases and discrimination is relatively well documented (Barrick et al. 2012; Derous et al. 2016; Purkiss et al. 2006).

As outlined by Derous et al. (2016), implicit biases can influence the interview process at various stages and in different ways. This includes the pre-interview stage, where non-relevant information derived from CVs, for example, can potentially bias all subsequent processing. In other words, the speed at which impressions are formed in interviews suggests that this processing relies on existing heuristics, and is therefore potentially open to implicit biases. For instance, a study by Purkiss et al. (2006) revealed that a candidate's foreign accent and 'ethnic name' activated stereotypes about ethnic minorities, which led these candidates to be viewed less positively by interviewers than the ethnic-named applicant without an accent and non-ethnic-named applicants with and without an accent. This initial impression also affected subsequent ratings of job suitability. The latter finding is consistent with confirmation bias, selective attention, and processing which serves to reinforce the stereotype. Once an initial impression has been formed based on stereotypes, the person making the judgement tends to filter and interpret information in a way that is consistent with the stereotype and disregard any information that counters it (Jonas et al. 2001; Nickerson 1998; Sherman et al. 2005). Anchoring bias (see Tversky and Kahneman 1974) is also likely to be active here, whereby the irrelevant yet salient information noted during the formation of initial impressions subsequently serves as an 'anchor' for final decisions (Derous et al. 2016). We are reluctant to deviate from a given anchor in making judgements (Eroglu and Croxton 2010), something that Derous et al. (2016) consider being a crucial factor impeding post-interview decision-making. There is some evidence that

the effects of anchoring bias can be reduced when a situational interviewing technique is adopted (Kataoka et al. 1997).

Interviews are particularly susceptible to bias when conducted in the absence of data relating to valid predictors of job performance, such as ability test scores, which should have the effect of focusing attention on information that is relevant to the job role. For a similar reason, unstructured interviews are more prone to bias and adverse impact than structured interviews (Levashina et al. 2014), due to the exchange of non-job-related information and the fact that interviewers might rely more on their implicit assumptions (Derous et al. 2016). Structuring an interview, for example, by ensuring that all candidates are asked the same questions or by using standardised rating scales to evaluate candidates' responses to each question, is known to enhance the validity of interviews in selection (Campion et al. 1997; Levashina et al. 2014).

Other techniques found to reduce interview bias include allowing interviewers to evaluate candidates after each question during the interview, instead of at the end (Levashina et al. 2014), in addition to building in accountability by asking recruiters to justify their pre-interview impressions (Derous et al. 2016). Derous et al. argue that greater individual accountability for selection decisions might instigate more thorough processing of personalised information and alleviate the impact of implicit biases relating to minority groups. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that when white managers are made to feel accountable for their evaluations of applicant pre-interview information such as resumes, they demonstrate less racial bias (Ford et al. 2004).

9.3.4 In-group Bias

In-group bias relates to the implicit tendency to feel a stronger degree of affinity with, and trust of, others who we categorise as similar to ourselves. In other words, *Ingroup bias designates favoritism toward groups to which one belongs* (Greenwald and Krieger 2006, p. 951). As such, in-group bias also provides a reminder that biases can be favourable as well as unfavourable. Also referred to as the 'similar-to-me' bias, in the

recruitment context the effect denotes the tendency for interviewers to recruit candidates in their own self-image. As identified by research conducted several decades ago, this effect exerts substantive influence upon their subsequent decision-making process (Rand and Wexley 1975). Research has revealed that raters favour candidates who share similarities with themselves in respect to several different dimensions, including values and habits, beliefs, demographic, and cultural variables such as leisure pursuits, experiences, and self-presentation styles (Bagues and Perez-Villadoniga 2012; Prewett-Livingston et al. 1996; Rivera 2012).

Drawing from 120 interviews, with employers in elite professional service firms, Rivera (2012) discovered that concerns about cultural similarity were highly salient to employers in the selection decision-making process, and often outweighed concerns about absolute productivity. As a result, in-group bias acts to perpetuate homogeneity within organisations, a problem not only due to the potential for discrimination but also given the known advantages of diversity for team and organisational performance. Indeed, research suggests a number of destructive outcomes are associated with selection of managers based on the similar-to-me effect, including increased groupthink and decreased functional conflict (Gholipour et al. 2008).

In-group bias affects cognitive processing in various ways. For instance, raters tend to notice and remember more detailed information about interview candidates similar to themselves, asking more questions to obtain information about 'ingroup' candidates. In contrast, they tend to notice and remember less information about candidates they see as different to themselves, ask questions, and selectively retain information that confirms their existing stereotype about them (Bartlett 2009).

Lin et al. (1992) examined the effects of interviewer and interviewee race and age similarity under two different interview formats: a conventional structured panel interview and a situational panel interview. No age similarity effects were detected with either interview procedure, but same-race effects were evident. Furthermore, analyses revealed stronger same-race effects with the conventional structured interview than with the situational interview.

Once the interview has been completed, implicit bias can still be introduced into the final decision-making effort. As outlined by Linos and Reinhard (2015), final decision-makers are susceptible to a host of biases, including status quo bias, self-serving bias, groupthink, and the availability heuristic, making this a particularly critical part of the interview selection process.

9.3.5 Promotions and Reward Decisions

Research also suggests that in-group bias may also influence promotion and reward decisions, due to the differences observed in relation to attribution bias. Individuals tend to be more generous in their explanations of 'ingroup' persons' behaviour, for instance, more often attributing success of those similar to themselves to internal, dispositional characteristics. In contrast, the achievements of 'outgroup' individuals are more likely to be attributed to external and less-stable characteristics such as chance or fluke (Hewstone 1990). In-group favouritism has also been demonstrated, under experimental conditions, in relation to allocation of rewards (Hung-Ng 1981), and ratings of subordinates' performance, in terms of similarity in demographic characteristics (Tsui and O'Reilly 1989).

Unfortunately, research has historically suggested that promotion decisions tend to be highly subjective. Based on vague or irrelevant criteria, and thereby open to significant bias: *Despite their importance – for both orgs and individuals- we know very little about how any why promotions occur…there has been very little work done on how actual promotion decisions are made* (Ruderman and Ohlott 1994, p. 14). In a review of 64 promotions in three Fortune 500 companies, it was noted that *formally collected data didn't enter into the promotion decision* (p. 14), but promotion decisions were based on *an intuitive, subjective process that concentrated on their personal knowledge of the candidate and opinions of others* (p. 14). In the face of vague or ambiguous criteria, there is a tendency for promotion decision-makers to rely upon perceived similarity to themselves, or the extent to which they feel 'comfortable' with an individual, reasons given more often for promotions involving male employees than

females (Ruderman et al. 1995). Other research as demonstrated that the effects of applicant race and gender were only present for promotion decisions made by homogenous (all white male) panels, but were eliminated when diverse panels (mixed gender and/or race) were used (Powell and Butterfield 2002).

More recent research provides a more nuanced understanding of the stage at which discrimination appears more likely to be introduced into the promotion and reward decision-making process. In a large North American service sector organisation known to take pride in offering a diverse work community, for example, Castilla (2008) found no race or sex differences in performance evaluations by managers but significant white male advantages in the size of salary increases awarded in response to these performance evaluations. Castilla believed this differential to be accounted for by two main mechanisms. The first was a lack of accountability on behalf of the decision-maker for ensuring that their decisions are fair. The second was a lack of transparency, allowing bias to go unnoticed at the salary award stage. As argued by Castilla, *the invisibility of salary increase amounts eliminates concrete salary comparisons among employees and thus has the potential to mask unfairness in the performance-compensation link in organisations* (p. 1516). In addition, a study investigating a matched sample of 192 female and male UK executive directors revealed that bonuses awarded to men were larger on average and more sensitive to fluctuations in performance than for female executives suggesting that organisations may be biased to more readily recognise good performance from males (Kulich et al. 2011).

The evidence outlined above illustrates the 'hidden' yet pervasive nature of implicit biases, and as a result, how many existing talent management processes are at risk of causing discrimination as a result. Implicit cognition is an essential and unavoidable part of human information processing, which means that implicit biases, and the potential discrimination that can lead from them, can emerge at any stage of the talent management process; from recruitment and selection, to promotion and development opportunities. So the important question is what can be done about this?

9.4 Recommendations for Practice

The continued lack of diversity in many modern workplaces has been well documented in the popular press over recent years, particularly with regard to gender. Despite attempts to tackle the issue, for instance, through legislation, policy, and interventions such as diversity training, progress has stagnated (Dobbin and Kalev 2016; Sealy et al. 2016). The academic literature has long recognised the importance of subconscious, implicit biases in the act of discrimination (e.g. Greenwald and Banaji 1995), and now a substantial body of evidence suggests that in order to tackle discrimination in the modern workplace, attention must be paid to the more subtle, implicit biases.

Although some employers have recognised the problematic influence of implicit, subconscious bias on organisational decision-making, the development of solutions to mitigate their impact is in its relative infancy. The main barrier would appear to be their invisible nature; since implicit biases operate at an automatic, unconscious level, we are unaware of their existence. Naturally, we do not take action to mitigate something that we are not aware exists. Given that automatic, subconscious processing forms an unavoidable part of human information processing and decision-making, it is probably safe to assume that the decisions taking place in your organisation are exposed to them.

Addressing this issue requires a different approach since rules and legislation will not necessarily be effective in achieving a reduction in discrimination resulting from implicit processes (Bartlett 2009; Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Bartlett argues that not only is *law is an ineffective instrument for eliminating behaviours we cannot readily define or correct* (p. 1899), but it may even be counter-productive. She argues that confrontation about biases which people do not consciously exhibit may inadvertently trigger guilt, subsequently leading to avoidance and resistance, and ultimately to more stereotyping.

Furthermore, some argue that individuals may be able to overcome the automatic reliance on unconscious biases such as stereotypes when encouraged to engage in more effortful impression formation processes, or individuation (Dipboye and Johnson 2013; Fiske 2000). However,

others disagree, arguing that awareness or increased deliberative effort is insufficient to overcome subconscious biases, due to the fact that they operate at an automatic, subconscious level (Kahneman et al. 2011). As articulated by Bartlett, *good intentions…are largely ineffective to stop implicit discrimination* (p. 1893).

Perhaps the most obvious way of removing bias from selection, recruitment, and reward decisions is to remove the human from the judgement and decision-making process. Indeed, evidence suggests that digitised job testing is beneficial but only if managers are not given the chance to overrule the test outcome (Hoffman et al. 2015). Aside from removing the human from the equation, the existing evidence points towards two broad areas which offer opportunities for reducing implicit biases in recruitment, selection, and promotion decisions. These are greater focus on the decision-making process itself, and the organisational, cultural, or environment within which these decisions are made. Below, these two areas are explored in terms of implications and recommendations for practice.

9.4.1 The Decision-Making Process

Research has highlighted that greater attention needs to be paid to the decision-making process itself, in order to unearth and address the subtle factors that influence selection and recruitment (and, indeed, reward) decision-making processes (Rivera 2012). As highlighted by Rivera:

> …e*ven after accounting for measures of applicants' human capital, social capital, and demographic traits, models of employer hiring still exhibit significant unexplained variance. Consequently, much of what drives employer decision-making is still a mystery to scholars.* (p. 1000)

Existing evidence highlights a number of steps that can be taken to reduce implicit bias in the selection, recruitment, and reward decision-making processes. Despite being the most commonly used tool, anti-bias training for assessors involved in the process seems 'weaker than its prevalence would imply' (Linos and Reinhard 2015, p. 17). Some studies have

produced positive results (Carnes et al. 2015; Kawakami et al. 2005), but given the nature of the findings and that positive results were only found under specific circumstances, Linos and Reinhard argue that there may be unconscious resistance to anti-bias training. Similarly, Chavez and Weisinger (2008) argue that w*hile few data exist on diversity training effectiveness, there is significant anecdotal evidence that many organisational diversity programs have either failed or brought about less than desired results* (p. 334). Alternatively, evidence does show promise for the following:

Reviewing Applications and CVs

- Screening of resumes and other applicant information should be undertaken 'blind', with any factors irrelevant to job performance omitted, particularly those known to trigger stereotypes such as candidate name, age, gender, and photograph.
- Rather than assessing resumes individually, they should be compared with each other, in batches. Bohnet et al. (2012) found that assessors are more likely to focus on relevant, future job performance when candidates are evaluated jointly rather than separately. When candidates were assessed separately, evaluation tended to focus more on group stereotypes, making joint evaluation not only more effective, less likely to lead to discrimination, but also more cost effective.

Interviews

- Where performance can also be evaluated 'blind' (such as with orchestra auditions, Goldin and Rouse 2000) it should be.
- Interview panels should be diverse.
- Interviews should be structured, situational in nature, and incorporate relevant data where available, to encourage interviewers to focus on relevant factors. As argued by Derous et al. (2016), by structuring an interview in this way, interviewers are likely to gather more comprehensive, standardised, and comparable information about all applicants. As a result, this reduces the likelihood of selection decisions being made based on biases, instead encouraging

interviewers to engage in information that is more conscious processing.

- Whilst it is generally accepted that a 'warm up' conversation is helpful to relax candidates at the start of an interview or other selection process, research shows that it is during this period that irrelevant social information can be introduced, potentially triggering in-group biases. Consideration should be given, therefore, to whether the 'warm up' can be conducted by an individual not involved in the decision-making process.
- Evaluation of candidate responses should take place at the end of each question or interview section rather than at the end of the whole interview. In addition to reducing demand on memory and information-processing capacity, this also ensures that evaluations are specific to the job-related factors identified rather than becoming a generic, global judgement that is not anchored in the relevant data.
- Bias can also be reduced by including people in final decision who have not been involved in assessing candidates since their job is simply to take a balanced overview of the different sources of assessment data. This might also help in ensuring that final 'wash up' decision-making sessions are not reduced to vague, overarching discussions of organisational or cultural 'fit'.
- Use a range of metrics, and before conducting interviews, commit to hire the candidate whose final score is the highest on the relevant metrics. Do not let intuition or liking override the data. As argued by Linos and Reinhard (2015), 'stick to what the scores tell you. It is important not to reduce the predictive power of tests and other scored assessments by introducing partial opinions or post-hoc rationalisation (p. 17).

Promotion and Reward Decisions

- Promotion decisions should also be made by diverse panels and efforts taken to ensure that decisions are based upon clear, formalised, objective criteria.

- Decision-makers should be made accountable for ensuring that their promotion and reward decisions are fair, and transparency should be provided in the monetary awards allocated on the basis of their judgements.

9.4.2 The Environment and Organisational Culture

Factors in the environment and organisational culture can influence both the decision-makers and the performance of the candidates, the latter via stereotype threat. Some research suggests that individual-level interventions to promote identity safety and affirm personal values can mitigate the effects of stereotype threat (Cable et al. 2013; Markus et al. 2000; Sherman and Hartson 2011). However, others argue that due to stereotype threat being a social product, it can only be addressed through broader solutions, which look beyond the individual, to the context. As articulated by Markus et al. (2000) it:

> *…cannot be achieved or maintained by one's self, alone. Identity is a social product and a social process that is interdependent with one's ongoing interactions. It is through engagement with and recognition by others that an individual becomes a person and identities are conferred.* (p. 236)

Research has identified several simple environmental cues that can trigger stereotype threat among prospective recruits, even extending to the virtual environment such as the company website. As articulated by Casad and Bryant (2016):

> …halls decorated with photographs of senior management and executives that represent Caucasian males may trigger doubt that women and minorities can advance in an organisation. Other seemingly benign objects, such as the choice of magazines in a reception area, can affect the perception of the organisation's diversity values (Cohen and Garcia 2008). Do the magazines reflect a diversity of tastes and are they targeted to diverse audiences? Décor that communicates a masculine culture, such as references to geeky pop culture, may signal to women and those who do not identify with these cues that they do not belong.

Consideration must also be given to what is considered and promoted as 'good' in a particular organisational culture, since this will explicitly or implicitly feed into recruitment and promotion processes, yet may or may not relate to factors that actually influence effective job performance. To avoid bias, recruitment and promotion/reward decisions must be based on competencies that have been demonstrated to be predictive of effective job performance, not simply those characterised by the current culture.

In a similar vein, I would argue that careful consideration needs to be given to the weight placed on an individual's 'fit' with the prevailing organisational culture, particularly within recruitment. Which elements of culture are we expecting people to have a good 'fit' with, exactly? Clearly, surface-level elements of culture, such as dress, are likely to be much less relevant to job performance than deeper elements of culture, such as core values. However, the former is much more apparent, and therefore can potentially bias our judgement of fit due to the salience bias (the tendency to use more salient, noticeable, or available sources of information to steer our judgements), even though we may believe we are making our judgement based on other, more relevant criteria. Furthermore, there is also a risk for judgements based on clear, specific, and relevant criteria, to be marred at the final stage, by overriding the objective data with a generic, subjective consideration of fit. Consequently, both HR/recruiters and business leaders have a responsibility to ensure that this consideration is used appropriately. To what extent do we need people to fit with the prevailing culture? Are we simply recruiting people who are similar to ourselves because that is what we are comfortable with? What evidence do you have that homogeneity on any level would be beneficial to organisational performance? These are key questions that HR and business leaders need to address.

In addition, the 'mere exposure' bias (whereby increased exposure to something is misattributed to liking) can also help breakdown stereotypes. For example, women exposed to female leaders in social contexts are less likely to express automatic stereotypical beliefs about women (Dasgupta and Asgari 2004). Research has also shown that just meeting and forming a new connection with a member of a previously devalued outgroup can change implicit attitudes towards that group dramatically

and rapidly (Olsson et al. 2005). Similarly, employees of minority groups also demonstrate better attainment when work was organised using teams with less rigid hierarchical job distinctions, and intergroup contact or networking opportunities were increased, which served to reduce stereotypes, increase female, and minority access to managerial positions (Kalev 2009). Consequently, it can be seen how quotas or aspirational targets for achieving a specific representation of minority groups (e.g. women on boards), although controversial, may reduce stereotype bias, and also influence the normative dimension of culture.

9.5 Conclusion

Workplace discrimination, it can be argued, has 'gone underground'. Whilst explicit negative attitudes towards minority groups may have diminished over time (Dovidio 2001), gender and race bias in society today is 'largely implicit' (Bartlett 2009, p. 1893). One of the most pervasive yet 'hidden' elements in this puzzle is the subconscious cognitive processing surrounding almost every decision made regarding people at work—such as whether they are selected to work there in the first place, to whether they are given equal opportunities for promotion once there. Implicit biases present a thorny challenge for equality and diversity because so deep rooted are these biases that not only are they often invisible but the owners of the biases are not consciously aware of their existence either. Consequently, to be successful in achieving diversity, practitioners must pay attention to the 'hidden' biases.

These more subtle, deeper-rooted forms of discrimination require more subtle and deeper-routed interventions. Instead of attempting to 'outlaw' implicit bias, it is important to tackle its motivational underpinning. Bartlett (2009) argues that instead of excessive legal pressure which 'undermines people's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and thus their commitment to non-discrimination norms' (p. 1894), people need to internalise non-biased attitudes and values. Furthermore, given the normative influence of organisational culture on attitudes and behaviours (and, in turn, the collective influence of employee attitudes and behaviours on shaping organisational culture), it is also important

that implicit bias is addressed at the collective, cultural level. Indeed, it is argued that the success of diversity programmes is dependent on organisational situational factors, such as culture, strategy, and operating environments (Jayne and Dipboye 2004), and therefore such initiatives will have limited success unless concepts and actions around diversity and inclusion are embedded into core people processes such as performance management and leadership development.

Finally, it is also important to reflect on the difference between diversity and inclusion. Just because an organisation or community is diverse, it does not mean it is inclusive. As defined by Frost and Kalman (2016), *real inclusion is about bringing those differences together to add value* (p. 49). With this in mind, Chavez and Weisinger (2008) outlined three main objectives, which constitute a strategic approach to organisational diversity, designed to create a more inclusive, culture of diversity:

- Establish a relational culture within which people feel proud of their own uniqueness, while becoming socially integrated into a larger group by celebrating the 'me' within the 'we'.
- Maintain an inclusive culture within which employees are intrinsically motivated to take ownership of the learning experience and to learn from each other so that organisational members can discover and appreciate multiple perspectives.
- Incorporate an organisational strategy that capitalises on the multiple perspectives individuals contribute to creativity, productivity, organisational attractiveness, and employee well-being.

Unfortunately, although it is almost a decade since Chavez and Weisinger's publication, there appears to have been little research carried out to progress this work. For researchers, therefore, there exists a need for research to explore in greater depth, the key features of a culture of diversity, and to identify what steps can be taken in the effort to promote one. In addition, given the significant body of evidence highlighting the range of implicit biases evident in recruitment, selection, and promotion decision-making, a closer look at the decision-making process seems well overdue, to identify the extent to which implicit biases account for the

significant unexplained variance in selection and recruitment processes, and subsequent discrimination.

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