

POSITIVE CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE



DIVERSITY AUDITS AND THE ROLE OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING

In this 7x7x7 article, we look at how Unconscious Bias Training has grown in popularity, but we also explain the need to take a more holistic approach to 'Diversity and Inclusion' (D&I).

THE EXPLOSION OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

The past number of years has seen an explosion in the volume of unconscious bias training. This is a positive development for people at work. It indicates organisations' awareness of unconscious bias and the need to address it. However, on its own, it comes with a health warning as training alone is not a salve for broader cultural biases and is rarely enough to establish an authentically inclusive culture. In our experience, it is critical that organisations first carefully consider and crystallise their long term strategic objectives for diversity & Inclusion (D&I) before implementing narrow diversity initiatives such as unconscious bias training.

Despite its popularity, unconscious bias training can be a controversial and divisive subject. Why is unconscious bias so controversial?

We believe it is due to three fundamental traits of unconscious bias, which we will address in this article:

- It's difficult to define;
- It's difficult to measure;
- It's difficult to change.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO DEFINE

By definition, unconscious bias is elusive, this can make it a tough concept to grasp. It can also be challenging to see its relevance in our day-to-day lives. The reality is that unconscious bias affects us every day. Our biases influence every decision that we make, no matter how big or small.

A bias is a tendency to believe that some people or ideas are better than others and can sometimes result in treating people unfairly. Our biases not only affect our opinions and how we act, but also how we perceive the world. Unconscious biases are formed outside of our conscious awareness and they stem from one's tendency to organise the social world by categorising.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO MEASURE

There is an argument to be made that unconscious biases are not just difficult to measure, but impossible to measure. The best tool that we have for determining unconscious bias levels is the 'Implicit Association Test' (IAT). The tool was developed by researchers in Harvard and Stanford in 1998 and over 6 million people have completed different versions of the test to date.

Most of the research has found that the IAT to be reliable and valid, but some studies do bring it into question. It should be noted that the researchers did not design the IAT to be held to the same standards as a 'clinically diagnostic' tool. Instead, the tool is a way to get people to think about their possible unconscious biases and the effect that might have on their day to day decisions.

In our experience, it's paramount to highlight to those that complete the IAT, that the score they receive does not mean they behave in an overtly biased way towards different groups. Many people believe that because they have a bias or unconscious bias, there is something wrong with them as an individual. That simply is not true, instead, our biases are a reflection of our predisposed neural pathways and our upbringing in society.



IT'S DIFFICULT TO CHANGE

There is copious research dedicated to identifying the plethora of different ways in which we are unconsciously biased. Unfortunately, there is less research that identifies effective ways to reduce our levels of unconscious bias. Nonetheless, we have found that effective unconscious bias workshops utilise the following methods to mitigate the effects of bias:

- Outline mechanisms to allow participants to hold themselves and others accountable when making decisions.
- Focus on real life scenarios both in the form of case studies and personal experiences shared by participants.
- Highlight through research, the importance of ensuring that you are in the correct mindset (i.e. not hungry or tired etc.) when making decisions.

Unconscious bias training becomes problematic when it is perceived as the 'Poster Child' for D&I. It is unwise to assume that implementing unconscious bias training alone will rid your organisation of all its biases. Organisations are far too complex for that alone to work. We have found the organisations that successfully implement unconscious bias training, also take a strategic approach to D&I.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF BIAS: DIVERSITY AUDIT

One of the best ways to do this is to conduct a diversity audit in order to inform the right diversity strategy and action plan for your organisation.



We find this method to be effective for two reasons:

1. The organisation can gain buy-in from key stakeholders e.g. by consulting with staff members.
2. The strategy is tailored to fit the unique needs of the organisation.



Diversity audits normally involve the following stages:



Benchmarking: Another key element of a diversity review is benchmarking the organisation against best practice exemplars in the industry.

External Brand: It's vital that the outward image of the company in relation to its services, clients and consumers is included in the audit.

LEVERAGING DIVERSITY

Unconscious bias training has grown exponentially in popularity in the last number of years and it is part of a broader positive change towards achieving inclusion and leveraging the potential benefits of diversity such as:

- Increased productivity;
- Increased creativity;
- The attraction and retention of talent.

We ask you to first consider the long term and strategic objective of D&I in your organisation and how unconscious bias training may fit into that. From our experience and research, this approach will equip your organisation to achieve genuine inclusion and leverage the wide-ranging cultural and commercial benefits of diversity.

If you would like to learn more about unconscious bias, discuss or develop your organisation's diversity & inclusion strategy, we would love to hear from you:

✉ : info@seven.ie

☎ : +353 1 405 4880