



Unconscious Bias 2.0

How do you see the world?
Unconscious biases influence our actions even when
- by definition - we don't notice them.

Course Description

About the course

This course is different to most unconscious bias e-learning modules.

We're not going to pretend that after this e-learning, and clicking through scenario slides – you are going to be magically cured of your unconscious biases.

No, instead, we want to take you on a kind of unconscious bias journey.

We predict, as you discover more about unconscious bias – you're going to go through some key stages.

The first being denial – “Me, bias – never!”

After that comes apathy – “If bias does exist – I'm sure it's no big deal.”

And finally, despair, as the reality of your biases sink in – “I'm a monster – I can't change.”

It's at this point that we'll provide you with some actionable advice and take away challenges that can help to combat unconscious biases where you work.

We really hope you enjoy discovering how your brain works.

Key insights

- Are you biased? – Discover that you are indeed biased, but don't worry, so is everyone else.
- Organisational Bias – Explore our case studies that demonstrate how unconscious bias can impact organisations that are actively trying to avoid discrimination.
- Big Deal – We dispel the myth that bias is no big deal, and show how many different groups are affected.
- Benefits of Diversity – Diversity is a competitive advantage. Find out why.
- How to beat it – Importantly, we give you three takeaway challenges to help you become more aware of your own biases, and how they impact your work.

Who is it for?

- Anyone who is responsible for recruitment, promotion and assessment.
- Anyone who wants to improve decision making.
- People who are simply curious about how their brain works!

Course format

As opposed to traditional training, the kind you might experience when completing compliance topics, this course was designed to awaken your understanding of the unconscious. So, you won't find scenario testing. You won't find sections dedicated to certain minority groups. And you won't be assessed on how well you did. If we did ask you questions about bias, you'd only answer with your conscious brain anyway (you'll find out all about this in the course), meaning the results would be worthless.

This course uses animated explainer videos to tell the story of unconscious bias, and explain how it plays a big part in your life, especially at work. It doesn't cover every aspect of the human brain, instead we focus on interesting research studies that bring the topic to life.

The real purpose of the course is to challenge learners to create their own unconscious bias action plan. We provide some tools to do this. But, recognising that unconscious bias is a very personal journey, we want to inspire people to reflect on their own biases. We believe this, not traditional box ticking, is the way to drive real change in this area.

We hope you agree.

Voice Over Script

Trailer

Have you ever wondered how you make decisions?

Most of us would like to think that we weigh alternatives and arrive at well-thought-out conclusions.

But every day, we make countless decisions without even realising it.

Every moment, we're inundated with around 11 million bits of information.

And yet, research suggests that our conscious brains can only handle something like 40 bits of information a second.

This means our minds are constantly processing information, and for the most part, without our conscious awareness.

Our brains evolved this way to ensure survival.

This 'automatic thinking' acts as a danger detector – determining if something or someone is safe.

Where people are concerned, these decisions are hard-wired into us.

We respond positively to people we perceive to be like us, and react against people perceived to be too different.

Which was OK in life or death situations...

But not so great in the workplace.

Sometimes these mental shortcuts can lead us astray, especially when they cause us to misjudge people.

When we see someone, whether we think about it or not, we are automatically making judgments about them.

The subtle assumptions we make about people can have lasting effects on who we're promoting, who we're hiring, and who we're putting in leadership positions.

It's important to recognise that everyone has these biases.

Think of it as a human brain software glitch.

Of course – it seems unfair to choose a CEO because of height, hire someone because of their sex, or give lower performance scores to people who are overweight – and yet all of these things continuously happen, without us even realising we're doing it.

The good news is, despite the complex nature of the problem, mitigating the impact of unconscious bias is a relatively simple matter of raising awareness and developing a more mindful approach at key decision making times.

Just as you would avoid a dangerous blind spot when driving.

We want you to become aware of your own unconscious blind spots.

In doing so, you'll recognise the effects they can have on others, and you can take steps to combat unconscious bias in your workplace.

Navigation Page

Before we start – we want to explain how the course works.

This course is different to most unconscious bias e-learning modules.

We're not going to pretend that after 30 minutes of e-learning, and clicking through scenario slides – you are going to be magically cured of your unconscious biases.

No, instead, we want to take you on a kind of unconscious bias journey.

We predict, as you discover more about unconscious bias – you're going to go through some key stages.

The first being denial – “me, bias – never!”

After that comes apathy – “If bias does exist – I'm sure it's no big deal.”

And finally, despair, as the reality of your biases sink in – “I'm a monster – I can't change”

It's at this point that we'll provide you with some actionable advice and take away challenges that can help to combat unconscious biases where you work.

We really hope you enjoy discovering how your brain works.

And it all starts, with two tables...

You can start when you feel ready.

Unconscious Exercise

Take a look at these two tables.

Which one do you think seems longer?

That's interesting.

Almost everybody selects the table on the left.

Now, the great thing about visual illusions is we can easily demonstrate mistakes.

So let's start by putting some lines on the tables – ok, this still doesn't help.

But what about when we animate the lines...

We can now see how the eyes can be deceived.

But as soon as the lines are taken away, the table on the left, again, looks longer.

It's as if we've learned nothing.

This is because it's impossible to overcome this sense that the left table is longer.

Our intuition is fooling us in a repeatable, predictable, consistent way.

And there is almost nothing we can do about it. Aside from taking a ruler and starting to measure it.

Not convinced? Think we shrunk the lines to fool you?

Let's try another one.

What colour are the center squares on each face of the Rubik's cube?

Brown?

Orange?

You might be surprised to find out, they are all the same.

Drag the squares around and see.

So think of this...

The human brain is evolutionarily designed to use vision. We use our vision more hours of the day than anything else.

And if we have predictable, repeatable mistakes in vision, which we're good at, what are the chances we won't make even more mistakes in something we can't demonstrate – such as cognitive illusion?

Takeaway

You might think “well that's just a silly illusion about a table and a Rubik's cube” – but what if your unconscious bias determines whether you hire the most qualified candidate, or give an employee a fair performance review?

Unconscious biases influence our actions even when—by definition—we don't notice them.

Challenge your thinking, and recognise that you are inherently biased.

Are you biased?

The scary thing about unconscious biases is they affect us all, and we can be oblivious to their power.

They are formed by the culture that surrounds us – environment, media, stories and language all influence how we think and behave toward a particular group of people.

To demonstrate this, take a look at this old riddle.

A father and son are in a car accident. The father dies at the scene and the son, badly injured, is rushed to hospital.

In the operating room, the surgeon looks at the boy and says, “I can't operate on this boy. He is my son”.

How can this be?

If your immediate reaction is puzzlement, it's because your unconscious mind has tricked you to think 'male' on reading surgeon.

The association that surgeon equals male is part of a stereotype.

Your bias is preventing you from figuring out that the surgeon could actually be the boy's mother. About 40% of people think this way when presented with the riddle.

Now of course, the boy could have had two fathers – or indeed two mothers – but we're looking at how our brains can react in a sexist way in this example. A lot of us are automatically assuming a woman wouldn't be a surgeon.

This is prejudice, and it is often wrong. But you should not feel guilty about this.

It is just one example of the different cognitive biases that can affect your decisions at work.

Whether hiring, promoting or building relationships, these cognitive biases lurk in the corners of our minds.

We've sifted through the piles of research, and created this cognitive bias section. There are thought to be 150 cognitive biases, so we can't possibly cover them all, instead, we've focused

on 4 key biases that are particularly important in the workplace.

As you work through the descriptions, see if you recognise any of them in your own behavior.

Confirmation Bias

A confirmation bias involves favoring information that confirms previously existing beliefs.

For example, if you believe that left-handed people are more creative than right-handed people. Whenever you encounter a person that is both left-handed and creative, you'll place greater importance on this "evidence" supporting the already existing belief.

Unfortunately, this type of bias can prevent us from looking at situations objectively, and can influence the decisions we make, leading to poor choices.

You can reduce confirmation bias by following these three steps:

1. Be aware of the danger of confirmation bias, and acknowledge that your judgment can be clouded by it.
2. Aggressively seek out and understand information that disagrees with existing beliefs.
And;
3. Talk to people who don't share your opinion. It's important that you listen to their reasoning rather than arguing your own point.

Affinity Bias

Affinity bias, also known as 'similar to me' bias, is a very common bias where we tend to like people who are like ourselves.

It occurs when we see someone we feel we have an affinity with, for example, we grew up in the same town, or they remind us of someone we know and like.

In the workplace, affinity bias can play a big part in who we recruit.

For example, when we interview someone we feel we have some affinity with, our micro-affirmations play out a bit more than they usually would with someone we felt we didn't share an affinity with. For instance, if they tell us they're a little nervous we may smile at them more or offer more words of encouragement. Whereas, if a person we shared no affinity with told us the same thing, we wouldn't be quite as warm towards them as we had been to the candidate we felt we shared a connection with. After the interview, you'd then speak in much higher terms of the first candidate and how much you feel they'd "fit in" over and above the second candidate.

Availability Heuristic

An availability heuristic is a kind of mental shortcut we use to simplify decision making.

When you are trying to make a decision, a number of related events or situations might immediately spring to the forefront of your mind.

As a result, you might judge that those events are more frequent and possible than others. You tend to overestimate the probability and likelihood of similar things happening in the future.

For example, after seeing several television programs on shark attacks, you start to think that such incidences are relatively common. When you go on holiday, you refuse to swim in the ocean because you believe the probability of a shark attack is high. When in fact, the probability of a shark attack is relatively low.

So, availability can be caused by something other than probability, and that might lead us to

make poor decisions.

If you're making a decision that is based on how likely an event will occur – you should seek out reliable statistics.

That's the way to control availability heuristics, and become an effective, logical thinker.

Bandwagon Effect

The probability of you adopting a belief actually increases based on the number of other people who hold that belief.

Bandwagon effect is a powerful form of groupthink.

Studies have shown that up to 75% of people will give answers they know to be incorrect, simply because others around them have given the same incorrect answer.

Being able to speak out is a useful skill at work. So, when you're in your next meeting, make sure you're not falling foul of the bandwagon effect.

Takeaway

When we acknowledge that cognitive bias exists, we can start to develop and use them to make sure we're treating everyone fairly.

It's important to remember that most bias stereotypes do not come from a place of bad intent. Bias is something learned over many years.

We just need to acknowledge their existence, how they affect what we do as leaders, and actively work on ways to limit their impact in the workplace.

Unconscious Bias Case Study

Are Emily and Brendan more employable than Laisha and Jamal?

Other organisations might be biased, but not mine – right?

A traditional view exists that typical discriminatory behavior in organisations is somehow conscious; that people who know better do the right thing, and those who don't cause bias.

A kind of good person, bad person paradigm of diversity.

Surely this doesn't occur in modern organisations which are actively encouraging diversity?

Well, researchers at MIT and the University of Chicago wanted to prove otherwise.

In their 2003 study, the researchers distributed 5,000 resumes to 1,250 employers.

These employers had stated in pre-interviews that they were aggressively seeking diversity.

The resumes had a key distinction in them.

Some were sent with names that were determined to be "typically white," like Brendan, and others with names that were "typically African American", like Jamal.

The results were shocking.

The applicants with "typically white" names received roughly 50% more call backs for interview than those with "typically African American" names.

Because the resumes were statistically identical, any difference in outcomes could be

attributed only to the factor manipulated. The names.

The study suggests that racial discrimination is still a prominent feature of the labour market.

Takeaway

When the results were published, human resources managers were stunned. They prized creating diversity in their companies, yet here was evidence that they were doing anything but. How was that possible?

To use the language of the psychologist Daniel Kahneman, we think both fast and slow. When deciding which résumé to pursue, we weigh a few factors deliberately. But for hundreds of other factors, we must rely on intuitive judgment — and we weigh these unconsciously.

Even if, in our slow thinking, we work to avoid discrimination, it can easily creep into our fast thinking. Our snap judgments rely on all the associations we have — from fictional television shows to news reports. They use stereotypes, both the accurate and the inaccurate, both those we would want to use and ones we find repulsive.

Big deal – I’m sure the effects are only small

By now, you might be thinking “ok, you’ve convinced me that bias exists – but so what? I’m sure the effects are only small”.

So let’s look at some statistics that demonstrate the extent to which unconscious bias impacts people in their organisations.

67% of the British public admits to feeling uncomfortable talking to a disabled person;

14% of workers have experienced some sort of appearance-based discrimination. (beauty bias)

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender job seekers are 5% less likely to get an interview;

80% of employers admit to making decisions based on regional accents.

Only 14.5% of all US men are taller than 6ft, but 58% of fortune 500 CEOs are over 6ft tall.

Ethnic minorities hold about 7% of board seats (less for ethnic minority women 3.2%) despite 36.3% of the population being of an ethnic minority.

Overweight women (discrimination starts at 27BMI) earn 6.2% less than colleagues.

And 15% of workers thought that having a 70-year-old boss would be unacceptable.

Wow – that’s a lot of numbers to take in...

But hopefully what this shows is that unconscious bias doesn’t just negatively affect one particular group of people – it can have a detrimental impact on any minority group.

Takeaway

Biases can be based on skin colour, gender, age, height, weight, marital and parental status, disability status, foreign accents, where you went to school... and many more.

If you can name it, there’s probably an unconscious bias for it.

Unconscious bias can have a profound effect on people and organisations – so it really is a big deal.

Benefits of Inclusivity and Diversity

There are many ways to break down diversity, but in this course, we'll use this model.

During this course, our prime focus so far has been on workforce diversity, but as you can see from the framework, other diversity layers are beginning to take on increased importance.

When we expand our understanding of diversity – we start to consider groups not previously considered, who may also feel excluded.

For example, introverted people are often overlooked for promotion, because the impression made on senior leaders is more visibly demonstrated by those with an extroverted personality.

So consider this – what talented individuals in your organisation are you overlooking because they are members of a minority group – or seem different?

If you don't spot the talent, they will leave to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Takeaway

Try to remember that every single person is great at things you may not expect.

How to Beat it

Here's the tricky part of the course – how can you change your unconscious behavior – when by nature, it is concealed?

It's true, there's no hard and fast solution to beating bias.

But remember, the aim of this course was to awaken your consciousness, not cure you.

We want you to consciously stop... dig deep and go hunting for your own biases.

When you find a little more about yourself and your unconscious biases – you can do something about them.

To help you with this, we want you to work on three important techniques for detecting bias within yourself and your workforce.

Number 1 – Try to become aware of your own biases

Recognise that as human beings, our brains make mistakes without us even knowing it. We're all biased and becoming aware of our own biases will help us mitigate them in the workplace.

And there's a scientific way you can prove this.

Project Implicit is a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard, Virginia and Washington Universities.

It involves several implicit association tests, designed to tap into hidden or automatic stereotypes and prejudices.

If you're feeling brave – or if you're still not convinced you have unconscious bias – we challenge you to visit the site, and take some of the tests. You might be surprised with the feedback you receive.

Don't worry, your scores are confidential, and there's no right or wrong answers.

But what the tool can do, is jump start your thinking about hidden biases.

Where do they come from?

How do they influence your actions?

And what can you do about them?

If you can't see that you're part of the problem, you certainly won't see yourself as part of the solution.

Number 2 – Achieve success through systems

As we've discussed, unconscious bias is the result of the brain's lightning speed when processing information.

Structure and systems can help to slow your brain down. This can be a good thing to do when making certain types of decision.

There are common activities within the workplace that provide an opportunity for bias to creep in.

Things like selection panels, recruitment, appraisal and promotion, project allocation, and so on.

Think back to our CV example earlier in the course.

Do you think the names of the applicants were important when deciding if they would be good at the role?

No.

So why do we look at them when selecting candidates?

Think about it – what other information are you presented with on a resume that could also be causing unconscious bias?

How about what year someone qualified?

Their gender?

Where they live... ?

You would never consciously exclude someone from the interview process because of their name, sex, or age – but we know, thanks to scientific research, that you might do so unconsciously.

So, take some time to think about how you can use systems and structure to reduce unconscious bias in your own decision making.

Number 3 – Hold yourself accountable

Accountability is important.

It is easy to reject the results and theories discussed in this course – but instead, we challenge you to hold yourself and others accountable.

Once people become aware of their own biases, and feel confident to talk about them and share experiences, research evidence shows that change can happen.

If, after this course, you decide to widen your circle of friends, or learn more about other groups, those efforts may, over time, reduce the strength of unconscious biases.

Summary

So, what have we learned?

We now know that bias is a real thing, and does exist.

We found out that we are all biased to some extent.

We discovered that even small amounts of bias can have dramatic effects at work.

And we talked about the many benefits of a diverse workplace.

We also challenged you to create your own unconscious bias action plan, by acknowledging bias, creating systems to minimise it, and by asking you to hold yourself and others accountable at work.

Don't be that person excluding others; recognise your unconscious actions and don't let them hold you or others back.

We hope you enjoyed the course, and that you're excited enough to tell others about what you've learned.