

## Unconscious Bias

### What is unconscious bias?

'Unconscious bias refers to a bias that we are **unaware of**, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our **background, cultural environment** and **personal experiences**.

### Impact of unconscious bias

- Hidden biases have the power to derail organisational success
- Unconscious assumptions arise when we let them shape or affect decisions we make, such as with recruitment, promotion, project assignments and openness to new sources of ideas
- Impacts not only on the recruitment decision, but the salary of the individual and the amount of development that is invested in their ongoing progression
- Possible to be unconsciously biased regarding disability, religion, race, gender, age, social class, and more.

### What can I do to Identify Unintentional Biases?

You can address discrimination issues by increasing your awareness of your unconscious biases, and by developing plans that make the most of the talents and abilities of your team members.

- Be aware/conscious of your own biases
- Be honest with yourself about the stereotypes that affect you
- Be mindful, respectful, curious and supportive of colleagues' differences
- Be conscious of the words and physical reactions when interacting with people
- Ensure the wording in a job advert does not favour one group of people over another
- Use gender neutral wording by avoiding gender-specific titles or terms
- Pay particular attention to your choices when you are feeling tired, rushed or stressed, as these situations tend to activate our biases
- Challenge stereotypes
- Improving processes, policies and procedures

Ask yourself:

- Do I typically recruit the same type of person, or personality type?
- When I say a candidate is not the right fit, what do I mean?
- What does my short-list of candidates look like? Do I speak up if it is not sufficiently diverse?
- How do I identify candidates for recruitment, promotion and succession?

Recruitment is an area where unconscious bias may come into play. Many people may unwittingly tend to favour applicants from their own familiar backgrounds, but you can take practical steps to reduce this bias.

## **Avoid Biased Behaviour**

- Surround yourself with positive words and images about people you might have stereotypical thoughts about, to help eliminate negative biases
- Think differently: make a conscious effort to seek out people with different backgrounds experiences and capabilities
- Learn differently: Seek out opportunities to immerse yourself and others in different environments
- Act differently: Take deliberate action to help prevent biases from affecting your behaviour and decisions
- Ensure the wording of your job advert does not favour one group of people or another (for instance, use words that appeal equally to men and women that are gender neutral)
- Read several applications side by side rather than just one a time. That way you focus more on the performance and skills mentioned than on issues such as gender
- Be proactive about recognising people's different capabilities
- Consider who might be an outsider and take steps to address the situation
- When preparing for interviews, establish clearly-defined, measurable criteria against which all candidates will be evaluated
- Evaluate your actions daily and be alert to the types of situations which could lead to unconscious bias affecting the outcome.

## **Remember everyone has unconscious biases**

- They are simply the brain's way of coping with and categorising all the information we receive every day
- Our tendency to discriminate against a group or type of person may not be intentional, but we can still do something to change it
- The more we expose ourselves to ideas, images and words that challenge negative stereotypes, the less discriminatory we will be
- Managers can play a key role in unearthing these hidden biases by declaring their intentions to be non-biased and develop a keen awareness of their own unconscious beliefs.