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Unconscious Bias
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Unconscious Bias

Most people if not all have bias and might not do it on purpose, it is unconscious – It is a blind spot that requires a shift on how we think about other people that we perceive different.
Bias is the very fundamental way we look at, and encounter the world to make sense of the world around us. Our decisions can be made without you being aware of it.
It is possible to be unconsciously biased regarding race, gender, age, social class, and more.

We all have the innate tendency to be drawn to people, ideas, and things that are similar to ourselves. One thing is clear: achieving a more diverse and inclusive work environment boils down to the ownership we as individuals take on with this challenge.

This is easier said than done, because like it or not, **our brains naturally work against diversity.** We all have unconscious biases--the innate tendency to be drawn to people, ideas, and things that are similar to ourselves.

The reality is that our attitudes and behavior toward other people can be influenced as much by our instinctive feelings as by our rational thought processes.
Our brains are hardwired to make unconscious decisions, because the number of choices we face every day would be overwhelming if we had to consciously evaluate every single one. That means there is a direct link between our unconscious thinking and our actions and behavior. So our hard wiring pattern of making decisions about others is mainly based on what feels safe, familiar, likeable, valuable and competent to us without us realizing it. Hence the importance at the workplace to be aware that when we take decisions or make choices it is crucial to know they are not based on bias.

Unconscious Bias can be:

1- **Explicit Bias:**
- Deliberate
- Conscious
- Easy to self-recognize
- Social and personal values
- Systemic prejudice and/or discrimination

2- **Implicit Bias:**
- Typically unconscious
- Involuntarily formed
- Habit
- Cryptic response
- "Micro-aggressions"

Some Types of Unconscious Bias: Bias can manifest itself in several ways:

Cultural bias is the phenomenon of interpreting and judging phenomena by standards inherent to one's own culture. Examples of cultural bias pertain to color, location of body parts (e.g., right hand dominant), mate selection, concepts of justice, standardized testing, acceptability of evidence, and taboos.

In-group bias refers to a pattern of favoring members of one's in-group over out-group members. This can be expressed in evaluation of others, in the allocation of resources, and in many other ways. The opposite of in-group bias is out-group bias, where, by inference, out-group people are viewed more negatively and given worse treatment. Out-group people are described in abstract terms, and will be referred to in more specific, concrete terms when they act in unexpected ways.

Gender bias: Unconscious bias against women leaders because we identify with men as "taking charge" but see women as best for "Caring and nurturing." In short, we view the man as a provider, and subsequently give him more money and opportunities compared to the woman who we don't see as the provider

Disability bias: Bias existing against people that have disabilities as looking at them being a burden or causing more work or unqualified for the workplace

First Impressions

The first impressions we form about people tend to have a lasting impact. In fact, first impressions, once formed, are surprisingly resilient to contrary information. Even if people are told that the first impressions were caused by inaccurate information, people hold onto them to a certain degree.

The reason is that, once we form first impressions, they become independent of the evidence that created them. Any information we receive to the contrary does not serve the purpose of altering the original impression.

Being aware of this tendency and consciously opening your mind to new information may protect you against some of the downsides of this bias. Also, it would be to your advantage to pay careful attention to the first impressions you create, particularly during interviews.

Why Do We Have Unconscious Biases?

Research suggests that we instinctively categorize people and things using easily observed criteria such *as age, weight, height, skin color, and gender*. But we also classify people according to *educational level, disability, sexuality, accent, social status, and job title*, automatically assigning presumed traits to anyone we subconsciously put in those groups.

The "**advantage**" of this system is that it saves us time and effort processing information about people, allowing us to spend more of our mental resources on other tasks.

The clear **disadvantage** is that it can lead us to make assumptions about them and take action based on those biases. This results in a tendency to rely on stereotypes, even if we don't consciously believe in them.

No matter how unbiased we think we are, we may have subconscious negative opinions about people who are outside our own group or what is called the "In Group". But the more exposed we are to other groups of people, the less likely we are to feel prejudice against them.

Key facts about unconscious (implicit) bias
Bias filters the multitude of information's we are regularly exposed to as human beings generally supporting our already held points of views and disproving points of views with which we disagree. We are generally convinced that not only our decisions are rational but in reality most human decisions are made based upon hidden beliefs and we then collect or generate the facts to justify them
It is a response it is automatic, uncontrollable and hidden from our conscious awareness it is the individual lens to interpret everything acting as filters for beliefs

Bias gives order to a world that constantly confronts us with information and stimuli.
Every day we group people, and situations into categories so we can make decisions about our world. Bias is what allows that grouping to happen'

Filters are perceptions, interpretations or preferences we do filters all by developing lenses that filter out certain things and let others in or keep them out depending on those filters and bias that we develop throughout our lives- depending on our life experience developing conscious and unconscious filters is a normal and natural phenomenon ALL people do that

It is a belief or attitude in your head, it is NOT a behavior attitude conscious or unconscious but once it manifests itself it becomes behavior
1- It is not a preference
2- Inflexible: i.e. ALL within a group are the same for example All New Yorkers are loud, or all Californians are flakers
3- That belief can be about something positive or negative

So how do we see the world more and more we are starting to see it in a **dualism** way or basically **US** against **THEM** depending on who you are could be political, gender, race etc. we have a tendency to create a wall between us and these people
If we look at the reality we know that us and them is more a social wall and artificial one

Prejudice is an attitude, **Discrimination** is a behavior. Is it **first impressions**, or a gut reaction to internal feelings? A feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to contact, or not based on actual experience. It is a belief or attitude in our heads. It is a gut reaction to a memory or an embedded feeling about something we experienced or seen in the past, it is not against the person in front of us.

Implicit Association
- How we behave often hinges on factors of which we are unaware of
- People's minds operate through *schemas*
- *"Schemas are simply templates of knowledge that help us organize specific examples into broad categories."*
- The schemas we use to categorize people are called stereotypes
- Stereotyping and prejudice are not the same

Stereotypes
Stereotypes are often erroneous and lead to unjustified conclusions about others: Conscious or subconscious. Represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude or judgment, can be caused by limited experience with different people

What motivates people is feeling threatened, fear from the OTHER which can be different gender, color, country, different sexual orientation when we talk about diversity

This fear plays with the mind and shows up we have access to how the mind works due to modern science-

OUR reactions are a result of incidents that that cause the brain to recall previous similar associations from our earlier programming- our brain connects in a similar way by the trigger if we perceive danger if different people from different backgrounds different things can get triggered
- Our brains use two information processing systems, which operate simultaneously:
  - Conscious: effortful, slow, rule-driven and limited in resources
  - Unconscious: automatic, fast, intuitively-driven and with large resources
- We categorize people and add value to those categories

Bias is an inflexible positive or negative conscious or unconscious belief about a particular category of people.

Our Bias kicks in whenever we have a perception of threat to our own survival or a threat to our physical or property safety, identity or sense of being. It is an instinct reaction as primal biological urge response that brings relief to tension (Human beings developed these instincts since the Caveman era)

Bias is the ability to distinguish "safe" from "Dangerous" which is a basic quality of our human brain to categorize and group information so our brains can make sense of them.

Neuroscience

Brain research that we have access to shows that the 1-"**Amygdala**" or reptilian brain process and memorizes our experiences of emotional nature especially fear (brain pic)

Then the information goes quickly to the 2-**anterior cingulated cortex** responsible for autonomic functions, rational functioning like decision making, empathy, reaction to rewards, emotion etc part of brain that makes things happen instantly

Then if we have time the information goes to the 3-**Pre-Frontal new cortex** responsible for Perceptual awareness, thought, language and consciousness – we are the only animal with the capability of recognition and think about what we do- and why did we do it

1&2 are the System ONE thinking: fast brain and 3 is the System TWO: slow brain

The capacity of 1&2 is huge and 3 is smaller

KEY learning from the Brain research

1- We tend to do things we know how to do or are used to because it takes less brain power- points of view we know right or wrong as it pops in our mind takes more effort to think about the different ones so we slip in what we know and we start thinking do we trust that person? We make these determinations all the time

2- We instinctively treat the other as "FOE" we come into a relationship with someone different we get in with caution there is a reason for this 24K years ago when we lived in communities before going to the water spots where other people/ tribes were there we really think about it and we are cautious because if we make wrong choices we die, we are oriented to be hesitant towards things or people that we don't know

So I want you to think about this

What are the "US" versus "THEM" in your world? Like parents and children/ different departments there are dozens not necessarily hostile or negative

As per a study done at the "*University of Florida*" by Psychologist Catherine Cottrell and her colleague Steven Neuberg at "*Arizona State University*"

"Human prejudice evolved as a function of group living. Joining together in groups allowed humans to gain access to resources necessary for survival including food, water, and shelter. Groups also offered numerous advantages, such as making it easier to find a mate, care for children, and receive protection from others.

However, group living also made us more wary of outsiders who could potentially harm the group by spreading disease, killing or hurting individuals, or stealing precious resources. To protect ourselves, we developed ways of identifying who belongs to our group and who doesn't."

Our safety is threatened by something or someone who appears to be outside of our norm or our community. The thing is our instincts haven't quite caught up to the reality and beauty of diversity as we experience it today.

While we may not be able to prevent our automatic prejudices, we are not doomed from progress. *Cottrell notes* that we are often able to self-correct when we become aware of our biases.

Why does our brain do that? At any given moment we group people, and situations into categories so we can make decisions about our world. Bias is the filter or group of filters that this multitude of information sips through.

We are exposed to almost 11 million pieces of information at any one time, our brain can recognize ONLY 40 of them or so, and can focus on about 5-7 at a time.

The unconscious mind is amazing, it can process vastly more information that our conscious mind by using shortcuts based on our backgrounds, personal experiences and cultural environments to make almost instantaneous decisions about everything around us

The problem is it is wrong quiet a lot of the times especially in matters that need rational thinking Our unconscious mind uses instinct not analysis our unconscious is fallible it is also bias it makes snap judgments about people we meet, categorizing them according to gender, social and other characteristics

In milliseconds we judge whether somebody is like us and belongs to our "in group" these are the people we favor, so men might favor men, and women might favor women, however we can belong to different "in groups" and we like to be part of an "in group" that is powerful which could mean a woman favoring a man over a woman that is "**UNCONSCIOUS BIAS**"

All of us have it and it colors our decisions without our realizing for example: Research reveals that if I were a man you would be more likely to be nodding in agreement right now because people pay more attention to a male's voice

Pre-established filters – are perceptions, assumptions, interpretations or preferences that we develop throughout our life experiences developing conscious and unconscious Bias as a result.

So where do we get our initial filters or Bias: Our first point of contact right after we are born are our parents, who expose us to their beliefs, values and cultures, then family members, schools, teachers, religious institutions and our own life experiences. If any of the above exposures has a **blind spot**

Blind Spot/s is/are transferred to us and they become our own blind spots that we in turn transfer to the next generation we come in contact with.

A blind spot is our responsibility though may be not our fault but we are accountable and responsible to recognize first that we have blind spots and to shed lights on them
Acting on Bias is NEVER positive even if based on positive content as it keeps us from seeing people as individuals *for example* assuming that all Asians have high income and drive BMWs.

Our unconscious Bias is our blueprint through life, it is important to mention that it is normal that we ALL have some degree of bias no matter how open minded we think we are.
The issue is not that we have Bias (we all do) is what we do with it, how do we act on it?

Why should we care about Bias in the workplace?
Bias is not easy to fix within an organization, it can be a systemic, often silent, and can go unnoticed; as it is difficult to identify and just as hard to correct.
Bias can be defined as "unreasonably hostile feelings or opinions about a social group; a tendency or inclination, particularly one that prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question."
In any workplace, bias can manifest between managers and employees, headquarters and field office staff, customers and employees, or citizens and immigrant workers. If decision makers (managers, supervisors, directors, project managers or executives) have Bias they can either promote someone with no merit (*positive bias*) or hold someone back as by not considering for a promotion (A mother because the promotion involves a lot of traveling); or not hiring a very qualified person (Not hiring pregnant females, or assuming that some physically challenged people can't handle the job).

To get the best of a workforce means that you need to select from the vast widest range of talents and that is not possible if unconscious bias is narrowing down the field for non-valid reasons as unconscious bias.

Bias unconsciously can evolve to **stereotyping** which can lead to **discrimination** which in turn can lead to law suits losing not only a lot of money but losing the organization's reputation with future inability to attract, recruit and retain qualified diverse employees.

We tend to prefer hanging out or working with people that look like us, feel like us, talk like us and have values and beliefs like us; even when we are asked for resources or referrals we still gravitate towards people like us because we know what to expect so it is comfortable and safe. We are more tempted to rapidly judge others or criticize them if they do not fall within the lines we have set for ourselves or within the values and beliefs we grew up cherishing.

If we step out of that comfort zone as anything else, we panic as we step into unknown territory, and we find it difficult to relate to others that are different; and we tend to shy away out of fear or lack of understanding

The typical challenges faced by organizations

- Slower progression of female staff to leadership positions
- Lower selection rates of applicants from some groups in the recruiting process
- 'Cloning' of existing leaders or job holders in selection or promotion decisions
- Lower performance ratings awarded for some groups of staff
- Low staff satisfaction ratings around manager-staff relationships
- Higher incidence of disciplinary action amongst some groups
- Lack of self-insight, awareness or motivation amongst senior managers/leaders to address the issues

The Impact of Discrimination

Most people especially in the workplace might not be aware of their prejudices, or prefer not to admit it, this can have damaging consequences on both the organization, its management, and its employees.

Studies show that how people feel when they're being treated and their perception of being discriminated against can negatively affect the workplace and affect various elements of their performance, such as commitment, job satisfaction, team work, productivity and work tension especially if they feel that their work performance evaluation is being influenced by bias or prejudice can create mistrust, lower morale, absenteeism, hostile work environment, and an increased likelihood of good skilled talented people leaving your organization, or worst case scenarios discrimination law suits. Distrust, caused by bias, creates an uncomfortable culture, where individuals mistake other people's motives and intentions.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership."

Types of micro-aggression
- **Micro-insult**: "Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's racial heritage or identity.
  - An example is an employee who asks a co-worker of color how he/she got his/her job, implying he/she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system."

- **Micro-assault:** "Conscious and intentional discriminatory actions."
  - □ Examples: "using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols - swastikas, or not associating with anyone that is different."
- **Micro-invalidation**: "Communications that subtly exclude negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color."
  - □ Example: "White people often ask Latinos where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land."

Micro-Inequities

Apparently small events which are often ephemeral and hard-to-prove, events which are covert, often unintentional, frequently unrecognized by the perpetrator, which occur wherever people are perceived to be 'different.'"

Examples of micro-inequities include:

- checking emails or texting during a face-to-face conversation
- consistently mispronouncing a person's name
- interrupting a person mid-sentence
- making eye-contact only with males while talking to a group containing both males and females
- taking more questions from men than women
- confusing a person of a certain ethnicity with another person of the same ethnicity
- rolling your eyes
- sighing loudly
- raising your voice, even though the other person has no difficulties hearing you
- mentioning the achievements of some people at a meeting but not others whose achievements are equally relevant
- consistently ignoring a person's emails for no good reason
- only reading half of a person's email and then asking the person about the content later
- making jokes aimed at certain minority groups
- being completely unpredictable in your grading of certain people's term papers
- issuing invitations that are uncomfortable for certain groups ("Please feel free to bring your wife")

Micro-inequities often had serious cumulative, harmful effects, resulting in hostile work environments and continued minority discrimination in public and private workplaces and organizations. What makes micro-inequities particularly problematic is that they consist in micro-messages that are hard to recognize for victims, bystanders and perpetrators alike. When victims of micro-inequities do recognize the micro-messages, it is hard to explain to others why these small behaviors can be a huge problem.

They are like carbon monoxide that goes unnoticed, no color or smell til it suffocates people to death.

Solutions

To lessen the impact of unconscious bias which is easier for us to notice in others, we need to raise the **awareness** about Unconscious Bias to everyone especially the ones that deals with hires and customers that are different encouraging everyone to

We can't cure unconscious bias but with self-awareness we can address it

We all have bias and prejudice and discussing them is risky as it is easily misunderstood or mistaken for racism. **You have to get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable**. The reality is that we will react negatively to things or people that are different. However, once it's established that they are not a threat to you, you can begin to embrace the discomfort that you are feeling and allow it to move through you before making decisions.

The habit is noticing this discomfort and not allowing it to be a part of your decision-making process at work and in life.

1- **Self-Awareness**:
   - *Identify your blind spots*: Take the [implicit association test by Harvard](http://implicit.harvardedu/implicit/demo/-) you will be surprised I promise you. http://implicit.harvardedu/implicit/demo/-
   - Ask yourself where your feelings about other people come from and whether or not you are ashamed or feeling guilt because of them
      - Ask yourself, "Did I learn this bias from a reliable source?"
      - Ask yourself, "How many people do I actually know who conform to my bias?"
      - Ask yourself, "How many people do I know who do NOT conform to my bias?"
   - Determine if your feelings about others came from actual incidents that happened or perceived feelings about other ethnicities, cultures or people
   - Check to see if your feelings were handed down from the last generation and seek to find what has changed in society to allow yourself to let down those walls
   - Ask questions to understand what you fear or read different publications
   - Join diversity and inclusion groups in your workplace or community
   - Check yourself often when you get a knee jerk reaction in the presence of certain types of people. Form a habit to notice the first thoughts that come to your mind when you meet someone that is different; we have the power to watch them when they first pop in our brains to deal with them
   - It starts by knowing who we are and what is our culture as well as what values and beliefs do we carry within ourselves
   - Recognize that it is normal for human beings to have unconscious preferences and biases that influences their decisions
2- Deliberately **slow down** decision making - Reconsider reasons for decisions: Train yourself to think differently: Being aware of bias reduces its power to shape our decisions. The conscious side of the brain is very capable of doing the necessary work to train our minds to think differently. Stop yourself when resorting to an unchecked assumption and

choose to think differently. And use the power of repetition to regularly remind you of your otherwise overlooked biases.

3- **Seek multi-dimensional feedback**. Don't just ask one Black person, or one Gay person, or one Woman, whether bias exists. Obtain multiple perspectives to gain deeper insights about whether your business environment is fair, inclusive and impartial.

4- **Build Trust.** Consistently making small changes over time is more effective than sweeping interventions that have no long-term strategy for sustainability. Also, leading by example is a powerful tool for building trust.

5- **Create opportunities to build relationships across differences.** Discourage the formation of cliques via the in-group/out-group phenomenon. Challenge stereotypical information and behaviors. Establish a formal process for handling team conflict.

6- **Provide organization-wide incentives for change.** You must establish "what's in it for me?" in order for people to really want to change. Perhaps you can tie outcomes to bonuses, raises or promotions. Or maybe you can link better performance with diverse groups to coveted assignments.

7- **Don't blame, or shame, others when bias is acknowledged.** Personal growth cannot occur when people are fearful of making mistakes. Create a "safe place" for people to acknowledge their *own* mistakes without being judged or disciplined.

8- Teach Employees to **Communicate with Respect. Monitor** each other for Unconscious Bias

9- It takes a **willingness to have an open mind** not being defensive and have the courage not only to admit that we have bias but to work on correcting them

10- Use the **power of Neurogenesis**: Which is creating new mental paths for our brains to process information in areas that do not play to our individual or organizational strengths. As any change it is not easy, but with perseverance, will, openness to accepting different things and people, and commitment either from the person or from the organization it can happen.

11- **Find common ground**: As human beings we will always have something in common no matter how small or farfetched it is like being dog owners, or loving rock and roll music or dancing etc.

12- Realize that our **assumption** of what is "acceptable" or normal may not appear or feel the same to others.

13- **Educate yourself** on different cultures and people, ask questions respectfully and be generous in educating others that ask for your help

14- Have **compassion and empathy** towards other human beings no matter how similar or different they can be

15- **Accept** (not tolerate) people for who they are not who you want them to be

16- Create a **culture of inclusion** in which we are adding more people, not subtracting any.

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