

Unconscious Bias

An Introduction To How Our Biases
Affect Our Lives and Work



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Introduction



Thanks for downloading our Unconscious Bias Ebook.

In this guide, you'll find everything you need to understand what Unconscious Bias is, how it affects you and your employees, and strategies and tactics for overcoming your biases in the workplace.

In recruitment, retention, promotion, even in the allocation in work, Unconscious Bias is at play.

Many consider Unconscious Bias to be a new brand for diversity training. For example rather than focusing on discrimination based on gender, race, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation, think about how Unconscious Bias impacts your business in areas such as Recruitment, Work Allocation, Performance Management, and Customer Relations.

We all have biases but how can we implement an Unconscious Bias strategy within an organisation?

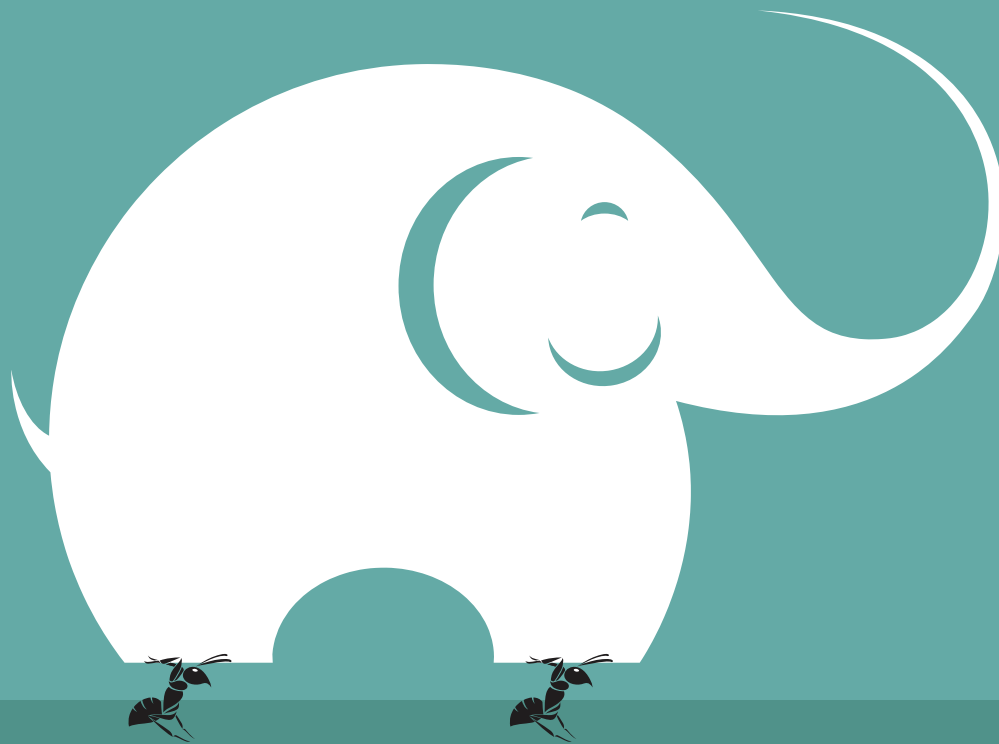
Enjoy the book and please get in touch if we can help you with Unconscious Bias Training. We look forward to hearing from you.

David Marshall

Founder and Managing Director, Marshall E-Learning Consultancy

Chapter 1

What Is Unconscious Bias?



What is Unconscious Bias?

Historically, social scientists used to think that certain people would hold negative perceptions or views about people that were different to them. The notion of stereotypes and prejudices was discussed at the conscious level. This was known as “Conscious Prejudice”.

However, developments in neuroscience now demonstrate that many biases are held at the subconscious level. This is known as “Unconscious Bias” and is clearly different from conscious prejudice.

The brain processes information in a certain way, we gather millions of bits of information. What happens at the unconscious level is that we categorise this information. We categorise people by gender, ethnicity and a whole range of other social categories, such as disability, body size, and profession – if they are a police officer or a CEO – and other social labels. This categorisation is useful for human beings as we use these visual clues to make assessments of people.

The obvious problem is that we take these random categories and we start to make positive or negative views based on our relationships with others. If someone looks and sounds like me, if we have a similar background, I am much more likely to give a positive attribution to them. If someone is different, I’ll be more likely to give them a negative attribution.

What is Unconscious Bias?

The consequences of this are numerous. For example, in recruitment and selection, if someone looks or sounds like you in a series of job interviews, you're much more likely to recruit that person.

Even if someone has a name that sounds like you, you're more likely to hire them – and bin those with names on CVs you can't pronounce.

There are other ways Unconscious Bias has an impact, such as who we want in our teams, who we give work to, and who you socialise with.

We'll go onto discuss those in more detail throughout this book.

What areas of work does Unconscious Bias affect?

Work allocation is a very much a key area affected by Unconscious Bias. If a colleague shares similar traits with you, you will make several assumptions about that person:

- **Trust:** We are more likely to trust someone like us, whether that's gender, ethnicity or another social label.
- **Competence:** When we're allocating stretch work (work that has high business impact or visibility to the client), you're likely to give that work to someone in your peer group, e.g. someone who went to the same university, or has similar work experience.

If you deliver high visibility work, clients will come into your business network. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as "Confirmation Bias" kicks in. They do the work and do it well, confirming your decision in the first place. The next time a piece of work comes in, you'll give that work to the same type of person. This creates a cycle where you're giving work to your business network and this stretch work lets them progress in their career, leaving others behind.

This bias also applies to performance management, where you are much more likely to score higher in work-related assessments if there is an Affinity Bias with those giving the performance assessment. When an Affinity Bias escalates, this can start to affect performance and pay.

How do our biases develop?

You're not born with a bias, they are learned through socialisation. But they become embedded in our neural pathways through experiences and the patterns we see. Positive contact with people affects Unconscious Bias, as it helps these biases become wired into the human brain.

We don't generally think about patterns, but patterns in society might develop as early as primary education. Primary teachers tend to be female, whereas financial executives tend to be male.

Another example is that with black cabs in London, drivers tend to be male and white. Whereas private cabs, like Uber drivers, tends to be male but non-white.

These are just some examples of patterns that are going on, but we generally don't notice them. But if you can become mindful and recognise the people who don't fall into that pattern, then you break the pattern of Unconscious Bias.

How can we control Unconscious Bias?

Lots of people undertake Unconscious Bias training. For example, you can take the Implicit Bias Test, which was developed by Professors Greenwald and Banaji at Harvard University. This tool is able to measure your levels of Unconscious Bias.

We use a similar tool with our global business clients as part of the Unconscious Bias education awareness programme. Everyone from senior execs to middle managers use this tool to identify their own Unconscious Biases and use that to cultivate mindfulness.

Recognising we all have Unconscious Bias is part of the process to bias control.

Some organisations are good at making sure all of their staff are politically correct, but this raises anxiety and makes people hesitant to raise conversations around things like race.

The problem with this is that making staff uncomfortable about discussing issues means they're not mindful of your biases and so can't control them.

Organisations need to make people comfortable about discussing sensitive issues so they can raise awareness of potential biases.

Why controlling our biases is important

All the research around Unconscious Bias is comprehensive and pretty indisputable. It's an interesting thing that most people would suggest that their decision making process is objective, rational and they are in control. But what we know from neuroscience and social psychology is that most of that is not true. Most of our decisions are irrational and emotional. If we can be aware of that, we are more likely to control our biases.

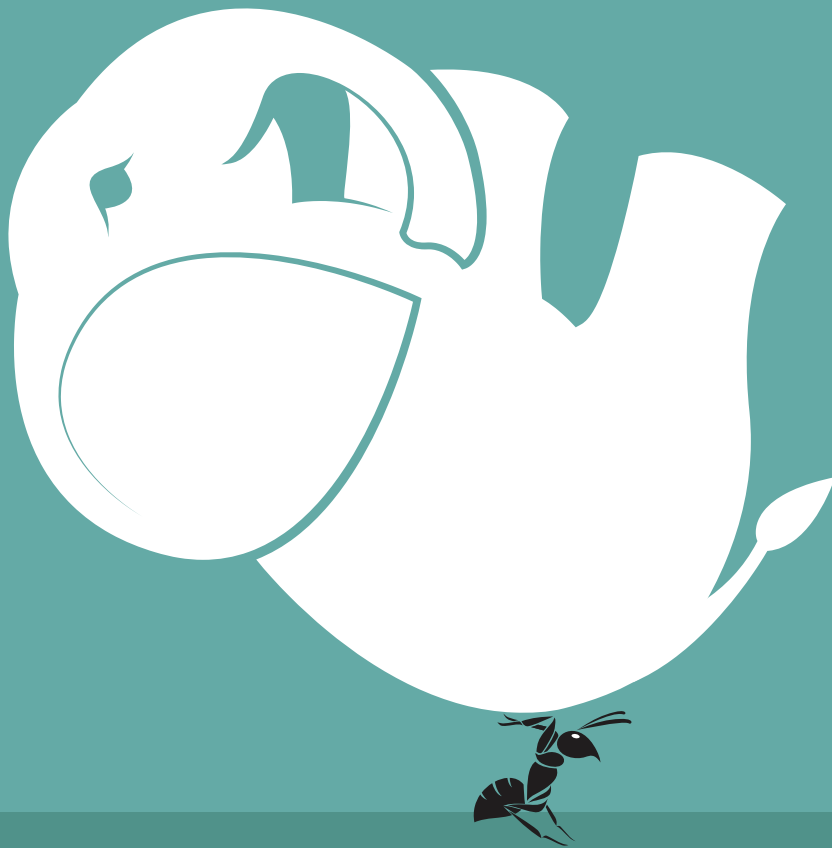
The research is saying that if you have affinities in business, then you're likely to make errors in decisions. If you're aware of your biases, you're much more likely to be challenging, be innovative, and have different insights into customers.

This is important from a business perspective and important in the global economy due to the movement of people. The global economy gives you access to customers and technology. This century will be defined by innovation in technology and the pressures of green economy and sustainability. But it also continues to be defined by diversity, which is why it's important to recognise Unconscious Bias in the workplace.

Those businesses that start to understand this will gain sustainability, productivity and profitability benefits. So in the modern business world, you need to be aware of Unconscious Bias in order to start controlling them.

Chapter 2

The Impact of Unconscious Bias



Impact on work

When Unconscious Bias comes into play, our decisions may not be as robust and objective as we believe them to be. So irrational, bias based decisions and behaviour are not good for business.

Unconscious bias has a substantial and far-reaching impact on work environment and culture, on daily interactions between colleagues around the office, and on client relationships.

It can seep into any situation where individuals have the power to influence outcomes through their behaviour, decisions and subsequent actions. Unconscious Bias has potentially negative implications on recruitment processes, staff development, performance appraisals, workforce retention, leadership and customer service – and consequently for bottom-line business performance and organisation reputation.

Unconscious bias might determine whether or not:

- The best candidate gets a job.
- The most suitable colleague is allocated responsibility for an important project.
- A performance review is aligned with bonus payment.
- Promotions are given on merit or favouritism. (see resources: The impact of favouritism on Work Groups)
- Clients feel that they have received a good service.
- Allegations of discrimination are upheld in tribunal.

Impact on work

The consequences of ignoring the dangers of Unconscious Bias can have a dramatic effect, not just on the culture of the company but also on the reputation of an organisation.

In 2013, banking firm Oppenheimer Europe was taken to an employment tribunal after employee Isabel Sitz, 42 claimed she was forced out of her job due to the culture of racism and sexism in the company.

The basis of the accusations was a sudden cut to her salary from £95,000 per annum to £15,000, as well as a long list of examples where the company frequently expressed a chauvinistic culture.

As a result the company was ordered to pay Miss Sitz a significant amount for lost earnings and injury to feelings, not to mention the significant damage to the company's reputation in such a high profile case.

Impact on society

Through our socialisation process, our personal experience and exposure to social groups in the media, we continue to pigeon hole certain job role to gender stereotypes.

For example, we continue to associate engineering type jobs with men and childcare roles with women.

These unconscious associations create an attitude toward these groups which is reinforced by the media over time in a variety of ways.

For instance: Men perform better in engineering roles over women and women are naturally better at bringing up children than men.

Based on these unconscious associations and attitudes we are more likely to recruit men into engineering roles and women into childcare roles.

Making assumptions

Our way of dealing with situations we encounter is to analyse them based on our own life experiences rather than treat everyone as an individual.

This may lead us to categorise people incorrectly and make assumptions about people.

Making assumptions based on one experience or a piece of information without checking whether this is the case for everyone.

It often results in people being treated less favourably and not being provided with the same opportunities or choices enjoyed by others.

Chapter 3

Unconscious Bias in Action



Unconscious Bias and Technology

Marshall E-Learning has been running training courses on Unconscious Bias for several years, but it's good to see that some of the leading technology giants of Silicon Valley are realising the same.

In August 2015, Facebook announced that it would be releasing its "Managing Unconscious Bias" internal training program to the public, with the aim of helping employees recognise unconscious prejudices to improve better relations in the workplace and mitigate the impact of Unconscious Bias.

"Managing bias is an essential part of building diverse and high-performing organisations," Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg wrote in a Facebook post announcing the release, echoing the outline we published in our Introduction to Unconscious Bias.

Facebook's announcements follows in the footsteps of Google, who have their own Unconscious Bias training programme, called "Unconscious Bias at Work". Last year, Google raised the issue of Unconscious Bias in the public eye through a video looking at how they go about making their employees aware of their own bias.

Unconscious Bias and Technology

We recently argued that confronting a lack of diversity is not just for tech leaders. By releasing their managing Unconscious Bias training courses to the general public, Facebook and Google will raise a lot of awareness about Unconscious Bias through their global presence.

This can only encourage more employers to take the right steps in making their workforces more diverse and inclusive.

However, there is still a long way to go if we are to fully tackle Unconscious Bias in the workplace.

Facebook's announcement comes in the second year of releasing their diversity statistics, Facebook and Google saw little progress from the reports they issued a year before. At Facebook, the percentage of women in tech positions increased to 16%, up just one percentage point from the previous year.

This shows that issues like Unconscious Bias must be part of a multi-faceted approach to addressing inclusion and diversity in the workplace. For example, diversity training programs are most effective in raising awareness and then setting the stage for more formalised approaches to addressing bias.

Unconscious Bias and Science

Contentious comments made by Tim Hunt, a university professor, about working with women in the lab has sparked fierce debate amongst journalists, academics.

In a speech delivered at a lunch for female journalists and scientists, entitled “Creative Science – Only a Game?”, he made the unfortunate comment: “Let me tell you about my trouble with girls ... three things happen when they are in the lab ... You fall in love with them, they fall in love with you and when you criticise them, they cry.”

Since then the media furore around these comments has reignited the debate about Unconscious Bias towards women in workplace. This topic is particularly sensitive given the measures that universities, research councils and industry recruiters, have gone to widen their talent pipeline to encourage more female uptake in the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths).

One such initiative in the UK is the Athena Swan scheme, whose purpose is to address the under-representation of women in STEM research and academia. The scheme awards universities a bronze, silver or gold status in recognition of their achievements and with the longer term aim of eliminating gender inequality.

Unconscious Bias and Science

To those that query the necessity of such measures, statistics show a sad but telling picture of how Unconscious Bias shapes the social contours of the national landscape.

Up until A levels, the number of girls and boys taking STEM subjects is equal. This begins to change however, with the gap widening the further along the academic pathway until only around only 13% end up working in STEM. For those that choose an academic pathway, only 43% of science undergraduates are women with only 10% going on to become professors. So why is this the case?

Some may argue that boys must be naturally more gifted at scientific subjects, however this particularly 1950s view of gender differences falls apart under scrutiny. According to a recent international study by the OECD, boys in the UK showed a significant 20% grade increase over girls in STEM subjects.

However once the girls were given confidence boosting and self-esteem exercises, they performed equally well as the boys. The study concludes that implicit biases shown by parents and teachers regarding gender roles, had a dramatic role to play in how girls perceive their own aptitude towards certain subjects. Once these perceptions are called into question and girls' confidence in these subjects is raised, their performance increases dramatically.

Unconscious Bias and Science

Unconscious Bias affects every area of our lives, including which political leaders we vote for. With the UK General Election fresh in our minds, we ask whether our Unconscious Biases affected the results of the General Election?

From a survival standpoint, bias is a positive and necessary trait. In politics, however, bias can be costly. It can cause us to vote in a way that is not best for us. We focus on all the wrong things, like a candidate's charm, their stellar CV or their credentials before they became a politician. None of this has any bearing on leadership potential.

International research shows that diverse teams outperform groups of the best individuals at solving problems. Yet research in neurobiology and psychology shows that similarity is easier for our brains to deal with, while difference is harder and therefore more uncomfortable.

This explains why we gravitate towards voting for 'people like us' and find it easier to make connections with those from similar backgrounds and with similar personalities.

One of the risks this creates is that we continue to vote for people 'in our own image', thereby perpetuating a situation in which diversity is limited.

Unconscious Bias and Politics

With relatively few women in top political roles, women's unconscious beliefs about career advancement could be holding them back from reaching the top.

Unconscious Bias comes in many forms, from assuming you need to take on more "masculine" characteristics to succeed, to doubting your abilities and strengths.

Joan Williams of the Center for Worklife Law said that women leaders have a tightrope to walk. Take on the attributes of a man and be disliked by all. Stick to being a woman and risk a lack of promotion, visibility and reward.

Christine Lagarde, the first female leader of the IMF, agrees:

"I'm the single voice constantly in a room full of men, it's only going to carry the organisation so far. Where I think it really makes a difference is when I can endorse the middle management, or upper-middle management and make them – generally in the minority – make them comfortable, confident, prepared to shake their views."

In addition, the recruitment selection for leadership positions is often based upon the attributes typically associated with male traits: assertion, aggression. To achieve diversity in politics, parties must invest in their female talent and nurture them through the party ranks.

Unconscious Bias and Politics

This example and by extension, Tim Hunt's rather ill-advised comments demonstrate that as a society we are still vulnerable to the challenges of Unconscious Bias and so must continue to strive to correct them where we find them.

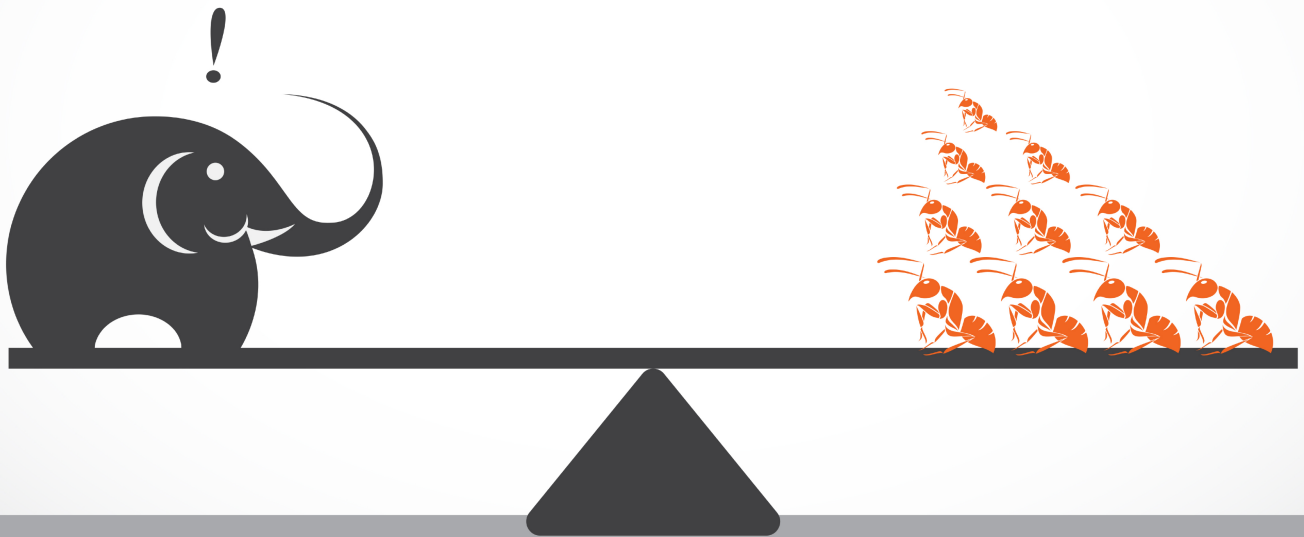
These inequalities are now far more likely to be subtle and insidious, after all most right thinking individuals see themselves as immune to bigotry and obvious forms of bias.

Despite this however, micro-inequities prevail within all areas of society, manifesting as small, subconscious cues that collectively deliver the message that a particular group is perceived as having lesser value than others.

One of the great challenges of today is for society to create a fairer society. For this to happen, more education and training on these topics is vital.

Chapter 4

Bias in the Workplace



Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the workplace

In the workplace, Unconscious Biases can mean that we sometimes treat a specific group or individual based on a set of assumptions that we perhaps don't fully appreciate that we hold.

However this is not behaviour which could be described as rational, and it is only by recognising these biases within ourselves that we can start to tackle and ultimately remove them.

And remove them we must try to do, for the effects of bias, however subtle, can actually be quite devastating to a business and its community. If we don't show each and every member of a team an equal amount of warmth and acceptance, over time, this failure to interact with everybody on an equal basis can impact an organisation quite negatively: staff can begin to feel alienated, and a whole host of problems can begin to unfold.

It's therefore very important that you begin to put in place some initiatives to start the process of overcoming Unconscious Bias throughout your company, and with the proper training this can be done quite readily.

We've put together 5 tactics that for overcoming Unconscious Bias in the workplace.

Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the workplace

1. Begin With Participants Exploring Their Own Unconscious Biases

Your course should begin with helping your participants to explore their own levels of Unconscious Bias – what are they? Where do they come from? How do they affect their behaviour towards others?

Once these issues have been identified, only then can issues of bias in the workplace be addressed. Breaking the habit of bias always begins with initial recognition of the habit in the first instance. Gaining insight into the subconscious helps us to realise the issues that need to be addressed and tackled.

Participants can be encouraged to write down what they think their biases might be, why they think they have them, and to recall an occasion where their biases have been proved wrong.

To help participants identify what their biases may be, there is an online Implicit Association Test (IAT) that can be taken to help people identify their unconscious preferences: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the workplace

2. Use Simulation

Participants can often benefit by being submerged in a simulated environment – as a new employee amongst a group of others, for instance. The simulation can involve the micro-gestures or lack of eye contact that are often associated with our Unconscious Biases. Other simulations can include conducting interviews, reviewing appraisals and dealing with customers.

Putting the participant in the shoes of the recipient of a prejudice can help enlighten them towards their own behaviours and how damaging even the subtlest of gestures may be.

3. Choose the Right Facilitator

Not just anybody should be given the role of Unconscious Bias training. This is a serious topic, and so therefore must be the reserve of somebody who is passionate about it, for this passion will be infectious. Trainers should always be highly qualified in diversity, social psychology and attitude formation.

It's also imperative that their style be non-threatening, inclusive, and they must also not resort to using guilt trips, as this can lead to resentment of the course, rendering the content redundant.

Overcoming Unconscious Bias in the workplace

4. Use Counter-stereotyping and De-biasing Activities

It's important to start making associations that are contrary to existing stereotypes. For example, think about incorporating media that features male nurses, elderly athletes, female bus drivers etc. The idea is to challenge participants' expectations, and therefore shed light on their own biases, whilst at the same time challenging them.

5. Micro-inequities and Micro-affirmations

Participants need to be made aware of how they might be displaying micro-inequities which show their Unconscious Bias at work. Micro-inequities are the small, sometimes barely perceptible gestures – things like eye-rolling, mispronouncing someone's name repeatedly, not introducing a person – which can leave the 'target' unsure if they really are being alienated, or just being over-sensitive.

Over time, if a person experiences lots of these, it can lead to low self-esteem, which can lead to low productivity and even depression.

Micro-affirmations are the remedy to micro-inequities. They are small gestures of inclusion and respect that anyone can make. Using them means that you're consciously overriding your own Unconscious Biases in order to become fairer, more thoughtful and respectful.

Chapter 5

Where next with Unconscious Bias?



Choosing Unconscious Bias Training

As discussed in previous chapters, the effects of Unconscious Bias are so subtle as to be barely noticeable and this results in what's known as micro behaviours, which - although they are barely perceptible - remain.

These might be just a lack of warmth in a greeting, or a failure to interact with people that we're biased towards. Whilst these behaviours might not seem like much, in the long-term they can be very damaging.

In an attempt to change this behaviour, it's necessary to look at the following:

- What impact it could have on the organisation
- How training can address it
- How work practices, processes and policies might affect such behaviour

By implementing an Unconscious Bias training course, it's possible for employers to break the habit of bias through education. Training can teach workers that whilst their behaviour isn't really their fault (thus doing away with the blame game), they can be taught how to be aware of their behaviour so that they can make better decisions based on knowledge rather than emotions.

Choosing Unconscious Bias Training

Unconscious Bias Training is ideal for employees at every level and especially useful for those in recruitment and HR, as well as managers and those that often deal with employees that are on a different level than themselves.

However, that's not to say that it's unsuitable for more junior members of staff, it really is useful for all workers to help them understand more about themselves and how biases affect their interaction with colleagues, customers and management.

A course can help people to recognise the biases that they are predisposed to when they take place.

However, it is complex and this is due to the way that our minds react to events and process the information.

Book Unconscious Bias Training Now

The Marshall E-Learning Unconscious Bias training course has been used by the Royal Mail, University of Oxford and Eversheds.

This ground-breaking Unconscious Bias e-learning course provides a comprehensive understanding of this new concept. After completing this course learners will be able to understand:

- The differences between bias, prejudice and stereotyping
- How Unconscious Bias affects decision making in activities such as recruitment, people development, leadership and marketing.
- An exploration of how Unconscious Bias works, including 'implicit association', 'affinity bias,' and 'the unconscious organisation'.
- Practical ways to challenge our own biases, to consciously break habits and to do things differently.

If you buy this course or any of our related e-learning courses you'll get all the updates we make, so you'll always be up-to-date with the latest legislation.

All our e-learning courses are highly interactive with rich graphics and audio-visual content, blending a variety of question-types to encourage learners to apply the learning in their daily lives.

Get in touch using the details below and we can discuss your Unconscious Bias Training needs.

The logo for Marshall E-Learning Consultancy features three horizontal bars in blue, pink, and green above the word "MARSHALL" in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below "MARSHALL" is the text "E-LEARNING CONSULTANCY" in a smaller, black, all-caps sans-serif font.

MARSHALL

E-LEARNING CONSULTANCY

Marshall E-Learning are an innovative and experienced e-learning consultancy, specialists in Equality & Diversity and Inclusion training, with a back catalogue of custom e-learning. We also offer Unconscious Bias training and a training consultancy service.

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