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What Steps can be Taken to Reduce Unconscious Bias in the Workplace?

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Abstract: This paper delves into strategies for mitigating unconscious bias in the workplace. Firstly, adopting the "blinding" approach involves acknowledging the presence of bias and instituting systematic policies to prevent its impact on pivotal decisions. Secondly, through "Unconscious Bias Training" (UBT) and the "Implicit Association Test" (IAT), employees gain insights into and reduce unconscious biases, enhancing awareness of their potential influence. Additionally, maintaining objectivity by scrutinizing choices and seeking feedback from others is a crucial step in bias reduction. Finally, the paper underscores the significance of cultural humility, emphasizing that leaders should recognize diversity and apply cultural humility for positive outcomes. By following these steps, the workplace can effectively minimize unconscious bias, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment.

Keywords: Unconscious Bias; Workplace; UBT; IAT; Cultural Humility.

1. Introduction

Contrary to conscious prejudices, unconscious (or implicit) biases are beliefs and viewpoints that we are ignorant of (Cornish and Jones, 2013). They are frequently automatically triggered, function outside of our conscious awareness, and influence how we act and make decisions on a daily basis (Kahneman et al., 2011). Our history, society, environment and personal experiences all have an impact on our unconscious biases. In addition to this, our brains are inundated with information during routine interactions. We use's hort-cuts' to quickly sift this information, which results in unconscious prejudices. These shortcuts, or heuristics, are used to efficiently classify individuals and tasks and make decisions. Social stereotypes have an adverse impact on our decision-making as a result of this natural processing (Atewologun et al.,2018). This essay discusses how to reduce unconscious bias in the workplace.

2. Blinding

Acknowledging bias' presence and establishing institutional policies to stop bias from having an impact on crucial decisions (Sah et al.,2015). Leading methodologist and psychologist Robert Rosenthal (1978) came to the conclusion that keeping the process "as blind as possible for as long as possible" was the greatest strategy to limit the likelihood of bias inadvertently influencing decision-making (Rosenthal,1978). There are many examples of the use of blinding in the workplace to reduce unconscious bias. For example, name-blind CVs for civil service applicants were announced by the UK government, and other prestigious graduate employers like Deloitte, KPMG, HSBC, BBC, and the NHS have taken similar steps (Noon,2018). Blinding is also evident in the criminal justice system. Racial minorities are disproportionately incarcerated in the US. That this variety is simply due to changes in criminal behaviours appears unlikely. According to behavioural science research, prosecutors unintentionally harbour racial biases. These unintentional biases are at play when prosecutors exercise their extensive discretion, such as when determining which offences to charge and when negotiating plea agreements (Sah et al.,2015). It is generally accepted that it is best for the police to conduct lineup questioning without knowing who the suspect is, so that the perception of witnesses is not influenced. The effectiveness of blinding as a technique for reducing racial and gender prejudice is supported by empirical data (Sah et al.,2015). Similar to this, editors of scholarly publications frequently omit the names and institutions of authors from submissions so they can evaluate papers solely on the basis of their scientific merits (Snodgrass,2006). Similarly, some teachers hide students' identities and names on papers when marking to prevent any favouritism (Carrington,1992). Overall, the use of blinding in the workplace, where feasible, is beneficial in reducing bias.

3. UBT and IAT

Workplace the phrase "Unconscious Bias Training" (UBT) is used to refer to a session, programme, or intervention in which participants learn about unconscious prejudice, usually with the goal of minimising the detrimental effects of bias on organisational practise and individual behaviour. Leaders are attempting to make their organizations more diverse, fair, and inclusive on a global scale in response to the outrage over workplace instances of racism and mounting evidence that employees suffer the consequences of exclusion. An essential part of their work is unconscious bias training (Gino and Coffman,2021). Employees are typically taught about the detrimental effects of biases on those with protected characteristics, such as women or ethnic minorities, while this is not a requirement of UBT. It is generally agreed upon that educating people about their (unconscious) prejudices is the first step in addressing how they present themselves (Lee,2017). The vast volume of research on unconscious bias is frequently used as the foundation for the creation, development, and modification of UBT (Atewologun et al.,2018). The aim of training is meaningful. Given the detrimental effects of preconceptions on results relating to workplace equality, diversity, and inclusion, UBT is intended to educate people about unconscious prejudice. Participants discover that stereotypes can still affect their attitudes and actions even when they are not actively endorsing them. The

purpose of training, in addition to raising awareness, is to impart strategies for reducing unconscious prejudice (Girod et al., 2016). However, Noon (2018) states that as of right now, there is no evidence of effectiveness for the UBT programmes, therefore the flurry of attention must be attributable to managers' instinctive attraction to them. All in all, although the effectiveness of increased use of unconscious bias training in the workplace varies from person to person, the ultimate goal is to increase awareness and change behaviour. It can still be used as a method to reduce bias and it is being used extensively.

About IAT, the most effective way for social psychologists to measure people's biases is through computer-based implicit Association Tests, of which the Harvard IAT stands out for its extensive application and high citation rate. These tests are used by social scientists to ascertain a person's favourable and unfavourable associations with concepts, images, or phrases for a number of purposes, from figuring out voting intentions to assessing consuming habits. They are used in particular to evaluate different types of prejudice, such as racial preferences, that may be "unconscious," or not expressly acknowledged by the person being examined. The idea behind the IAT is that reaction latency, which is a measurement of how long it takes for a brain to react to a stimulus (measured in microseconds), is a good estimate of how strong an association is. For instance, participants in the IAT test, which assesses racial prejudice, view photos of people from various racial backgrounds and link them with a variety of favourable and unfavourable characteristics. Each participant takes the test multiple times in different formats, and at the conclusion of the test, each person is given their racial preference score for a group. Using the IAT has the advantage that, unlike self-report measures, individuals cannot easily manipulate replies and bias can be assessed even if people are unaware of their prejudice or deny having any strong opinions (Noon,2018). Schnabel et al state that through a series of categorization tasks requiring quick responses, the IAT process is intended to evaluate instinctive linkages between the notions of biphasic targets (such as me vs. others) and biphasic qualities (such as shy vs. social). When highly linked conceptual poles are assigned to the same rather than different response keys, quicker replies are anticipated. A test's suitability for assessment purposes is determined by determining if it satisfies the pertinent psychometric standards and significantly aids in behaviour prediction (Schnabel et al.,2008). Even though we are aware that unconscious bias exists everywhere, it is challenging to determine how much it influences a person's regular interactions. Unconscious beliefs might frequently be different from a person's dominating behaviours. For instance, if questioned, healthcare workers can claim that they make an effort to treat every patient equally and don't think they have unfavourable attitudes towards patients. By definition, though, individuals might not be aware of any potential unconscious biases, and their actions might unintentionally suggest that these prejudices are there (Marcelin et al.,2019). The IAT avoids explicit questionnaires or interview methods, the results of which are likely to be more convincing. In the workplace, IAT testing of employees and managers facilitates the recognition of implicit biases that can be corrected to create a better working environment.

4. Remain Objective

Spend some time reviewing your choices (especially those that effect people and their careers) and keeping an eye out for any indications of prejudice. You should also make sure that your choices won't have a different impact on the team as a whole. Before you make your final choice, pause. Challenge your beliefs and initial impressions. To validate your reasoning, seek out comments from others. Consider whether you would make a different choice if it involved a member of a different social identity group. Finally, list the justifications for your choice in writing. Accountability will be encouraged as a result, which helps reveal hidden attitudes (Nalty,2016). This is particularly important if you are in a leadership role. Powerful, welcoming leaders work hard to prevent the emergence of implicit obstacles while they are in office. Leaders should create systematic, objective practises and procedures to assist employees in overcoming unconscious bias since bias flourishes in unstructured, subjective practises. Implicit prejudice can be lessened just by being aware that you have a responsibility and that you might be asked to defend your choices (Green and Kalev,2008). Being a good leader means knowing and defining one's own guiding beliefs and assumptions since integrity and authenticity are at the core of leadership. Personal development initiatives can encourage a vital process of self-discovery by putting an emphasis on the individual, offering organised feedback, and encouraging contemplation (Conger and Benjamin,1999). Numerous of the greatest organisations that we have seen highlight various facets of leadership for people with varying stages of development and in various roles or contexts. And reducing unconscious bias is an important step in their leadership development. Generally speaking, regardless of your role in the workplace, it is beneficial to yourself and others to remain objective and consciously reduce bias.

5. Cultural Humility

Leaders from a variety of fields, including business, medicine, nursing, and other health sciences, are becoming more aware of how crucial it is to recognise diversity and apply cultural humility to effective outcomes (Foronda,2020). Diversity in racial and ethnic groups, as well as in sexual preferences, socioeconomic standing, and interprofessional positions, all call for the use of cultural humility. These characteristics include self-awareness, egolessness, interpersonal support, self-reflection, and criticism. Cultural humility entails a shift in perspective and way of living. Being culturally humble is a way of life. Adopting cultural humility entails being conscious of the disparity in power and acting modestly in all of one's interactions with others. Although this process takes time, education, contemplation, and effort, development is presumably possible. The diversity pillars and beyond should be covered by this concept, which should be used more broadly. There must be cultural humility in the workplace, among professions, and across cultures. Those in higher positions of authority, including the president and people at all levels, must try to maintain their humility in order to support this effort. Everyone should exercise cultural humility on a daily basis to uphold the core virtues of respect, politeness, and compassion (Foronda et al.,2016).

6. Conclusion

In summary, we can reduce unconscious bias in the workplace through blinding, UBT and IAT, remaining objective and culturally humble. Because there are so many cultural preconceptions of different social groups (both male

and female), unconscious bias is pervasive. Stereotypes are a useful way to link certain traits or actions to any given social category. Experiences and social messages from daily life continuously activate and reinforce preconceptions throughout people's lives. The mechanism by which people build stereotypes about groups of people is the same everywhere, despite the fact that the content of this knowledge may vary from nation to nation or culture to culture. Stereotypical beliefs about a group may develop whenever individuals share particular social identities or features (such as gender, race, nationality, religion, or occupation) (Filut and Carnes,2017). Biases that we are unaware of exist. Everyone provides for them and brings them to work. Unconscious bias at work can reduce productivity and unintentionally influence an organization's culture (McCormick,2015). By eliminating and minimizing unconscious prejudice in the workplace that can jeopardize employment using a variety of techniques as stated above, we can positively impact the future of the workplace. Leaders can also make a difference by giving staff the necessary awareness training so they can recognize their own unconscious prejudices.

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