UNCONSCIOUS BIAS
Briefing Sheet

ISSUE SUMMARY

Unconscious bias, sometimes called implicit bias, is a cognitive manifestation of learned underlying attitudes, associations, and stereotypes about certain groups of people on a subconscious level. **Everyone has unconscious biases**. Unconscious bias can be dangerous because it operates below our conscious thought and we may not be aware that it is guiding our actions and decisions, but the results are clear. In the workplace, this bias can lead to a lack of diversity and representation. Unconscious bias can also lead to microaggressions that harm the victim, damage workplace relations, hamper advancement and further dilute diversity. The first step in addressing the problem of unconscious bias is to recognize that it exists and cultivate awareness of when it might be operating and influencing behavior and decisions, and to develop skills and tools to talk about it. Here are some examples of unconscious bias errors:

Unconscious Bias Error	Definition: The tendency of individuals to unconsciously and automatically…
Racial and Ethnic Bias and Colorism	Make generalizations or have reactions, associations, perceptions, preferences, and/or expectations about another person "at first look" at their skin color or tone, or other physical characteristics indicative of race and/or ethnicity.
Gender Bias	Make generalizations based upon personal values, perceptions and outdated, traditional views about men's and women's roles in the workplace.
Generational or Age Bias	Make generalizations based upon personal values, perceptions, or views about different generations in the workplace.
Background or "Like-Me" Bias	Positively view people who resemble themselves or have had similar experiences higher than others that have different backgrounds or experiences.

Unconscious Bias Error	Definition: The tendency of individuals to unconsciously and automatically…
"Non-Native Speaker" Bias	Positively or negatively view people who do not speak the native language, or speak with an accent, lower than others that speak the native language.
Attractiveness Effect	Positively or negatively view people who are physically attractive.
First Impression Bias	Make an initial positive or negative judgment of a person and allow the first impression to lead them to positively or negatively view the individual at a later time.
Halos/Horns Effect	Make generalizations based upon one experience with an individual and cause them to assume the same is true about all aspects of that individual.
Past-Performance Error	Permit an individual's poor (or excellent) performance in a previous rating period to color the manager's judgment about their performance in this rating period.
Stereotyping	Make generalizations based upon one aspect of diversity.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

- TED Residency: *What we can save by breaking unconscious bias* (Anurag Gupta, June 2017) (link provided under terms of a Creative Commons license, BY–NC–ND 4.0 International)

- *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji, 2013 – book)

- Built In: *16 Unconscious Bias Examples and How to Avoid Them in the Workplace* (Bailey Reiners, July 13, 2021)

- HuffPost: *5 Steps to Understanding Racial Bias* (John Fitzgerald Gates, May 27, 2016)

- Kansas State University Research and Extension: *Implicit Bias & De-biasing Strategies in Action* (Aliah Mestrovich Seay and Emily Dringenberg, February 2017)

- Inc.: *Make Better Decisions With These 5 Bias-Destroying TED Talks* (Jessica Stillman, July 31, 2017)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How to talk to people about unconscious bias

- How to develop awareness of your own unconscious biases

- How unconscious bias can lead to bad decisions

- Whether your company has inclusive practices

- Whether you can get feedback from a colleague or peer to assess whether your decisions may result from bias

ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Take an [Implicit Association Test](#) from Project Implicit.

- Be mindful and notice when you have exhibited a bias.

- Talk about this issue with your team. Consider forming small groups (think Communities of Practice) to meet quarterly and discuss issues of bias that may arise and/or role-play activities to practice addressing instances of implicit bias.

- Seek opportunities to engage with and talk to people with different backgrounds, lived experiences and perspectives (including through travel).

- Always remember that addressing bias is an ongoing and evolving effort that impacts each individual and organization differently.

IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESS

- Operating without an awareness of your and others' biases

- Not speaking up when you notice bias at work

- Sitting with the same people at meetings

- Not questioning assumptions

- Not assuming others' good intentions