

# Bias cut

Are you biased towards or against particular groups of people? Brave delegates at Learning at Work tested themselves to find out.

Have you ever found yourself wondering if the new person will 'fit in around here'? Or whether the candidate you are interviewing is 'one of us'?

These were just a couple of the questions put to Cabinet Office staff by Dr Nic Sale of business psychologists Pearn Kandola at the Unconscious Bias workshop.

'We all have a level of bias within us,' explained Nic. 'It's part of our natural, built-in fight or flight system.'

'Bias and stereotypes help us to assess whether the situation we are in is safe or whether we need to get out. They enable us to form first impressions about people, places and many other things.'

## The changing shape of prejudice

Over the last decade society has become less tolerant of stereotyping as a result of better education and awareness.



But Nic explained that this has been replaced by an era of 'modern prejudices', where people keep their stereotypes to themselves for fear of repercussions in an age of 'political correctness'. Instead, they will attribute their biases to other non-related factors.

'Unconscious bias' is a positive or negative bias towards a certain gender, ethnicity or other factor, of which we are unaware. It can affect many aspects of our lives at work, from recruitment to performance management and personal development. Left unchecked, it can create barriers to developing the diverse workforce organisations need to be innovative and creative.

'At its worst, stereotypes and prejudices



## Test yourself

Mid-year reviews are taking place soon. Why not measure the strength of your own unconscious bias by taking an [Implicit Association Test](#), so you can take steps to manage it when reviewing your team?

help to make discrimination a reality, because people will live up or down to those expectations,' said Nic.

## Beating bias at work

The challenge for organisations is to manage unconscious bias to prevent it coming into the workplace.

According to Nic, the first step is to recognise it is there. Legislation has its place, but individuals have a responsibility to identify, accept and manage their own prejudices. It's up to organisations to motivate people to change through training, contact with others and by creating an environment where people can challenge what they see as bias.

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## Going public

- 1 Training focused on processes, not skills development
- 2 Physical distance between appraisers and appraisees
- 3 Extroverts receiving higher appraisal ratings
- 4 Misunderstanding of different cultures
- 5 Long hours culture
- 6 Negative associations with working flexibly
- 7 Unclear promotion processes
- 8 Lack of available SCS positions
- 9 'Old boys' club'
- 10 Lack of role models

## Unconscious bias in action

- In a 60-minute job interview, the decision whether to hire or not is made within the first four minutes. The rest of the time is spent reinforcing that decision.
- Tall, good-looking men are more likely to get the job, and on a higher starting salary.
- A study by UMIST found that when identical application forms, except for the name, were sent to *The Times* top 100 companies, 50% selected Andrew Evans but rejected Ramesh Patel.
- Research has found that interviewers rate older applicants as less promotable and more resistant to change.

Source: research by Pearn Kandola



## A checklist for change

Four things to think about to manage unconscious bias:

- 1 Accept that we are biased
- 2 Do something about it
- 3 Create the right environment for people to challenge bias and set the right example
- 4 Be mindful of your actions and those of others.

'At its worst, stereotypes and prejudices help to make discrimination a reality, because people will live up or down to those expectations.'

Dr Nic Sale