

IPM and Unconscious Bias Training (UBT)

Definition of Unconscious Biases

Unconscious biases are the views and opinions that we are unaware of. They affect our everyday behaviour and decision making. Our unconscious biases are influenced by our background, culture and personal experiences.

Background

Unconscious bias training aims to increase awareness of unconscious bias and its impact on people with protected characteristics. A number of organisations use this training in the workplace to reduce this bias and reduce discriminatory behaviour and attitudes. More recently, the evidence for this training improving diversity outcomes in the workplace has been assessed.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission assessment of the evidence on UBT examined 18 papers.¹ They found UBT was effective for raising awareness when used with other tools such as more advanced training designs and longer term programmes. There was no evidence that it eliminated implicit bias and the evidence that it can change behaviour is limited. One study² looked at US companies and found that mandatory diversity training either does not change the number of women in management positions, or actually reduces it.

There are a number of hypotheses for why this training may backfire, although the exact mechanism has not been established. These include:

- People resent being made to do something and so are not receptive to the training
- The training brings to mind unhelpful stereotypes which people act upon
- The training makes people think that the organisation has solved its diversity problems and that any difference in outcome is justified. Or not due to individuals' bias

The Government Equalities Office commissioned the Behavioural Insights team to produce a summary of the evidence on unconscious bias and diversity training³. Titled 'Unconscious bias and diversity training - what the evidence says', the report highlights that 'there is currently no evidence that this training changes behaviour in the long term or improves workplace equality in terms of representation of women, ethnic minorities or other minority groups'. It also states that there is emerging evidence of unintended negative consequences.

Given the evidence, an internal review decided in January 2020 that unconscious bias training would be phased out in government departments⁴. The government expects other

parts of the public sector, including local government, the police, and the NHS, to review their approaches in light of the evidence and the developments in the Civil Service.

IPM Review

IPM Council has reviewed this training and discussed it at several Council Meetings. IPM training develops skills in awareness of unconscious feelings and thoughts and Council have agreed that UBT will not be introduced.

IPM will:

- Raise awareness of unconscious bias
- Implement its Equality and Diversity Policy and procedures
- Review any new evidence as it becomes available

References

1. Atewologun, D., Cornish, T., & Tresh, F. (2018). Unconscious bias training: An assessment of the evidence for effectiveness. Equality and Human Rights Commission; Girod, S., Fassiotto, M., Grewal, D., Ku, M. C., Sriram, N., Nosek, B. A., & Valentine, H. (2016). Reducing implicit gender leadership bias in academic medicine with an educational intervention. *Academic Medicine*, 91(8), 1143-1150.
2. Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2016). Why diversity programs fail. *HBR*, 94(7/8), 52-60.
3. 2.The Behavioural Insights Team (2020) Unconscious bias and diversity training - what the evidence says.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944431/20-12-14_UBT_BIT_report.pdf

4. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2020-12-15/hcws652>

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