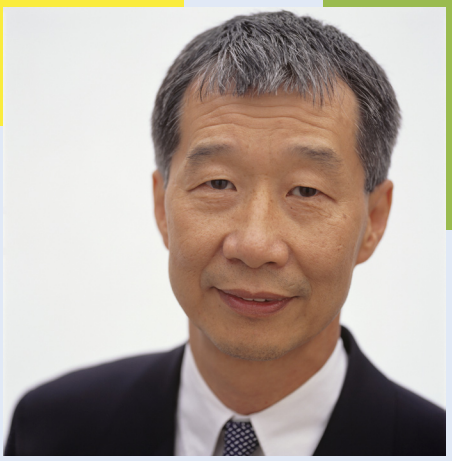
CDO Insights

August 2008 Volume 2 Issue 5

Diversity Best Practices

Proven Strategies for Addressing Unconscious Bias in the Workplace



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Testing Your Own Unconscious Bias

The most effective tool available for testing one's own unconscious bias is the Implicit Association Test (IAT), created and maintained by Project Implicit, a consortium made up of researchers from Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington. The IAT was created more than 10 years ago and has now been used by millions of people in over 20 countries. Researchers at these three schools, as well as others, have used the test to study many aspects of organizational and social performance, ranging from healthcare decisions to the operations of the criminal justice system. To take the IAT, without charge, go to https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.

Exploring Unconscious Bias

by Howard Ross, Founder & Chief Learning Officer, Cook Ross, Inc.

Consider this: Less than 15% of American men are over six foot tall, yet almost 60% of corporate CEOs are over six foot tall. Less than 4% of American men are over six foot, two inches tall, yet more than 36% of corporate CEOs are over six foot, two inches tall.[1] Why does this happen? Clearly corporate boards of directors do not, when conducting a CEO search, send out a message to "get us a tall guy," and yet the numbers speak for themselves. In fact, when corrected for age and gender, an inch of height is worth approximately $789 per year in salary![2] Similar patterns are true for Generals and Admirals in the Military, and even for Presidents of the United States. The last elected President whose height was below average was William McKinley in 1896, and he was "ridiculed in the press as 'a little boy.'" [3]

It seems not only unfair, but patently absurd to choose a CEO because of height, just like it is unfair and absurd to give employees lower performance evaluations solely because they are overweight. Or to prescribe medical procedures to people more often because of their race. Or to treat the same people different ways because of their clothing. Or even to call on boys more often than girls when they raise their hands in school. And yet, all of these things continuously happen, and they are but a small sampling of the hundreds of ways we make decisions every day in favor of one group, and to the detriment of others, without even realizing we're doing it.

1 Malcolm Gladwell discusses this phenomenon in his book, Blink, based on research conducted by Timothy Judge and Daniel Cable.
2 Judge, Timothy A., and Cable, Daniel M., "The Effect of Physical Height on Workplace Success and Income," Journal of Applied Psychology, June 2004, p. 435
3 Judge, Timothy A., and Cable, Daniel M., "The Effect of Physical Height on Workplace Success and Income," Journal of Applied Psychology, June 2004, p. 428

Lately, the concept of unconscious bias or "hidden bias" has come into the forefront of our work as diversity advocates because the dynamics of diversity are changing as we enter the 21st Century. Our tradition paradigm has generally assumed that patterns of discriminatory behavior in organizations are conscious; that people who know better do the right thing, and those who don't cause bias. As a result, we have developed a "good person/bad person" paradigm of diversity: a belief that good people are not biased, but inclusive, and that bad people are the biased ones.

One of the core drivers behind the work of diversity and inclusion professionals, almost since the inception of the first corporate diversity efforts, has been to find the "bad people" and fix them; to eradicate bias. There is good reason for this. If we are going to create a just and equitable society, and if we are going to create organizations in which everybody can have access to their fair measure of success, it clearly is not consistent for some people to be discriminated against based on their identification with a particular group. Also, clear examples of conscious bias and discrimination still exist, whether in broader societal examples like the recent incidents in Jena, Louisiana, or in more specific organizational examples.

Driven by this desire to combat inequities, we have worked hard through societal measures, like civil and human rights initiatives, to reduce or eliminate bias. We have put a lot of attention on who "gets" diversity, without realizing that to a degree our approach has been self-serving and even arrogant. "If they were as (wise, noble, righteous, good, etc.) as us, then they would 'get it' like we do!" Usually this is based on the notion that people make choices to discriminate due to underlying negative feelings toward some groups or feelings of superiority about their own. There is no doubt that this is often true. But what if, more times than not, people make choices that discriminate against one group and in favor of another, without even realizing that they are doing it, and, perhaps even more strikingly, against their own conscious belief that they are being unbiased in their decision-making? What if we can make these kinds of unconscious decisions even about people like ourselves?

The problem with the good person/bad person paradigm is two-fold: it virtually assures that both on a collective and individual basis we will never "do diversity right" because every human being has bias of one kind or another. Secondly, it demonstrates a lack of understanding of a reality: *human beings, at some level, need bias to survive*. So, are we biased? Of course. Virtually every one of us is biased toward something, somebody, or some group.

The concept of the unconscious was, of course, Freud's primary gift to the science of the mind, and, while it is not the purpose of this paper to delve too deeply into the esoteric, this concept drove the development of modern psychology. Yet, as behavioral psychology moved into the forefront during the 50's, 60's, and 70's, the study of the unconscious became de-emphasized. Recent research, driven largely by our ability to now manage huge quantities of data, and new exploratory techniques have given us an ability to not only observe the unconscious, but also to track and quantify its impact.

We now have a vast body of research, conducted at some of our finest institutions of learning – Harvard, Yale, the University of Washington, the University of Virginia, MIT, Tufts, and the University of Illinois, among others – that is showing us the same thing: unconscious or hidden beliefs – attitudes and biases beyond our regular perceptions of ourselves and others – underlie a great deal of our patterns of behavior about diversity.

The Necessary Purpose of Bias

Let's begin our exploration here by trying to understand the purpose of bias. We go out in the world every day and make decisions about what is safe or not, what is appropriate or not, and so on. This automatic decision making is what psychologist Joseph LeDoux has suggested is an unconscious "danger detector" that determines whether or not something or someone is safe before we can even begin to consciously make a determination.[4] When the object, animal, or person is assessed to be dangerous, a "fight or flight" fear response occurs.

4 LeDoux, J. The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life, New York: Simon and Schuster

On a conscious level, we may correct a mistake in this "danger detector" when we notice it. But often, we simply begin to generate reasons to explain why it was accurate to begin with. We are generally convinced that our decisions are "rational," but in reality most human decisions are made emotionally, and we then collect or generate the facts to justify them. When we see something or someone that "feels" dangerous, we have already launched into action subconsciously before we have even started "thinking." Our sense of comfort or discomfort has already been engaged.

From a survival standpoint this is not a negative trait. It is a necessary one. We have all heard the axiom, "it is better to be safe than sorry," and to a large degree this is true. If you sense something coming at your head, you duck. And if later you find out it was only a shadow of a bird flying by the window, better to have ducked and not needed to than to ignore the shadow and later find out it was a heavy object!

Where people are concerned, these decisions are hard-wired into us. At earlier times in our history, determining who, or what, was coming up the path may have been a life or death decision. If it was a hostile animal, or a hostile tribe member, you might die. Our minds evolved to make these decisions very quickly, often before we even "thought about it."

Our fundamental way of looking at and encountering the world is driven by this "hard-wired" pattern of making unconscious decisions about others based on what feels safe, likeable, valuable, and competent. Freud knew that the unconscious was far vaster and more powerful than the conscious. He described it as an iceberg: far more under the surface than above. Yet, recent research indicates that even Freud may have underestimated the unconscious. As Timothy Wilson, a University of Virginia psychologist who has studied the subject extensively has written: "According to the modern perspective, Freud's view of the unconscious was far too limited. When he said that consciousness is the tip of the mental iceberg, he was short of the mark by quite a bit – it may be more the size of a snowball on top of that iceberg."[5]

Scientists estimate that we are exposed to as many as 11 million pieces of information at any one time, but our brains can only functionally deal with about 40. So how do we filter out the rest? How is it that we can walk down a busy street in New York City with a virtual ocean of stimulus in front of us and still look for a specific person or thing? How can we have a conversation with a friend in the middle of thousands of people at a rock concert? We do it by developing a perceptual lens that filters out certain things and lets others in, depending upon certain perceptions, interpretations, preferences and, yes, biases that we have adapted throughout our life.

We can see this in some very mundane ways: if you or your partner was pregnant, did you notice how many more pregnant women you saw all of a sudden? If you were looking for a new car, how often did you suddenly start to see that car in commercials and on the street? Our perceptive lens enables us to see certain things and miss others, depending on the focus of our unconscious. It filters the evidence that we collect, generally supporting our already held points-of-view and disproving points of view with which we disagree.

As a result of these pre-established filters, we see things, hear things, and interpret them differently than other people might. Or we might not even see them at all! In fact, our interpretations may be so far off that we have to question, how do we know what is real anyway?

5 Wilson, Timothy, Strangers to Ourselves

IN FOCUS

The Diversity of Language: An Introduction

The language of diversity makes people uncomfortable. Words like discrimination, oppression, dominance, subordination, heterosexism, racism or male privilege often cause negative reactions. When people speak these words, others begin to focus on what it means for them. It is easier to become defensive, argue the meaning or ignore these interactions than it is to learn how the language of diversity affects others and impacts all aspects of our lives. And, if we can't talk productively about something, then we can't do anything about it.

American English is saturated with "the language of oppression," which is perpetuated by a lack of awareness and understanding of language as an instrument of oppression. For any change to occur we must find a way to deal with the pain and discomfort caused by certain terms and concepts. This is no easy task since the discomfort is rooted in our long history of discriminatory attitudes and practices. We need to recognize that the words that carry a charge present an opportunity for learning and change. Heterosexism isn't a word that accuses "heterosexual" people of being bad, just as "disadvantaged" doesn't refer to someone who is helpless. Used responsibly, these and other words can help us to understand issues and respond in a way that causes positive change for everyone.

Since we have all learned the terminology of oppression simultaneously with learning the English language, we cannot unlearn it without making a conscious effort. *The Diversity Factor Language Guide*, from which this introduction is excerpted, is an aid in the unlearning process. While not definitive, it represents what we have learned about communicating the dynamics of oppression. It focuses on the meaning and impact of group identities, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ableness. To support those interested in relearning, here are some general principles:

- Notice your defensiveness and accept the discomfort of unlearning and relearning. To be competent in this arena is the same as learning to be competent in anything else. It requires a desire to know, motivation to become informed, opportunities to practice and the willingness to correct your mistakes.

- The best way to check the appropriateness of a term is to ask a member of the group being referred to while remembering that no one individual represents the entire group.

- People often collude in oppressing others by failing to challenge negative terminology about their own group and by using such terminology when speaking about others.

- Not everyone in a particular identity group, or everyone at a particular time, will agree on the use of specific terms or expressions. For example, many people of color prefer to be called Hispanic. Others identify with Latino/a. Still others prefer to be called by their national origin, e.g., Cuban, Mexican, Colombian, etc.

- All speakers of a language are influenced by the dynamics of dominant and subordinated group membership. If you are a white, heterosexual man, your experience of language will be different from a black woman or a gay Asian man.

- Humor is a familiar and treacherous trap. It is next to impossible to gauge what might offend someone or for others to know your intent.

- Speaking and writing appropriately is, in the main, easy. Consider: "Would I want someone to use a similar expression about me?"

- Negative language used within a given identity group about itself and its own members is very different from the same language used by people outside the group—though such usage is also often objectionable to group members.

While the language of oppression is still with us, new words continue to emerge that are more accurate and descriptive, and allow us to be more successful in ameliorating oppression and more productive in our interactions with each other. People who apply their learning place themselves in a position to affect change in the world. If humankind can relearn the language of diversity, then we can relearn how to respect and treat each other with honor, dignity and love.

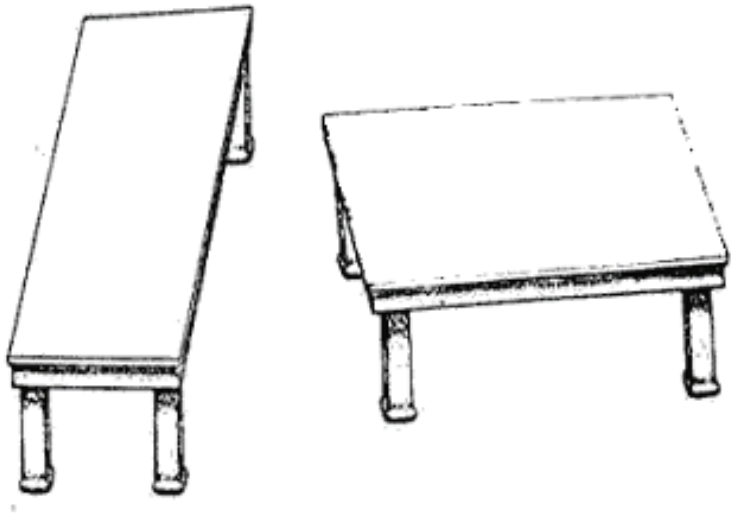
Excerpt from The Diversity Factor Language Guide (Fifth Edition, 2006)
http://www.eyca.com/diversity/languageguide.html
Used by special permission of Elsie Y. Cross Associates, Inc.

Seven Steps to Identify and Address Unconscious Bias

1. Recognize that you have biases.
2. Identify what those biases are.
3. Dissect your biases.
4. Decide which of your biases you will address first.
5. Look for common interest groups.
6. Get rid of your biases.
7. Be mindful of bias kick back.

Exercise of the Unconscious

Look at the picture below of the two tables and see if you can determine which of the tops is bigger. Or are they the same size, the same shape?



You probably would say: "Obviously they are not the same shape. The one on the left is clearly narrower and longer than the one on the right." Or is it?

Now take a piece of paper and either cut out or trace the table top on the left. Then lay your cutout or tracing over the top of the table top on the right. Which is bigger? That's right, they are both identical.

This picture was created by Roger Shepard, an Oxford and Stanford University professor.[6] We all have seen some of these kinds of illusions over the years, in Readers Digest or e-mail exchanges, and we often refer to them as optical illusions. We would be more accurate describing them as cognitive illusions, because the illusory experience is not created by our eyes, but by our brain. As Shepard says,

> "Because we are generally unaware that we are imposing a perceptual interpretation on the stimulus, we are generally unaware that our experience has an illusory aspect. The illusory aspect may only strike us after we are informed, for example, that the sizes or shapes of lines or areas that appear very unequal are, in fact identical in the picture."[7]

When we look at the picture, having no reason to assume that there is an illusion at play, we don't even consider that we might be seeing something different than what is obviously right in front of us. The problem is that it is not what is right in front of us at all.

6 Shepard, Roger, Mind Sights: Original Visual Illusions, Ambiguities, and Other Anomalies, New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1990, p. 48
7 Ibid, p. 46

> **"When we get conscious about managing diversity, we are "tuning in" to the indicators around us that tell us everyone does not see the world the way we do. While we know that intellectually, when it plays out in a difference of opinion, a different response, or a different way of being, behaving, dressing, talking -- you name it, we forget that everyone is not 'just like me.' It is at that moment that we have to wake up, realize we need to manage the diversity that is facing us and begin by thinking, "OK, who is in this mix and what are their perspectives?"**
>
> Dr. M. Elizabeth Holmes, Executive Vice President & Chief Learning Officer, Roosevelt Thomas Consulting & Training, from "Getting Conscious About Managing Diversity"

The bottom line? We make assumptions and determinations about what is real every moment of every day. We sort out those 11 million pieces of information, we see what we see, and we believe that what we see is real. Only occasionally do we realize how subjective those determinations are, and how much they are impacted not by what is in front of us, but by what we interpret is in front of us, seen through our own lens on the world.

The challenge is that even knowing that we are inherently biased, we may not be able to help ourselves. According to Shepard,

> "Because the inferences about orientation, depth, and length are provided automatically by (our) underlying machinery, any knowledge or understanding of the illusion we may gain at the intellectual level remains virtually powerless to diminish the magnitude of the illusion."[8]

Our perception, in other words, is so deeply buried in our "underlying machinery," our unconscious, that even knowing that it is there makes it difficult, or impossible, to see its impact on our thinking and on what we see as real.

The Deep Impact of Unconscious Bias in the Workplace

Now, if all of this is about a silly illusion about a table, then who really cares? But what if it determines whether or not you will hire the most qualified candidate for a job? Or give an employee a fair performance review? Or hire the right CEO?

Where diversity is concerned, unconscious bias creates hundreds of seemingly irrational circumstances every day in which people make choices that seem to make no sense and be driven only by overt prejudice, even when they are not. Of course, there are still some cases where people are consciously hateful, hurtful, and biased. These people still need to be watched for and addressed. But it is important to recognize that the concept of unconscious bias does not only apply to "them." It applies to all of us.

Each one of us has some groups with which we consciously feel uncomfortable, even as we castigate others for feeling uncomfortable with our own groups. These conscious patterns of discrimination are problematic, but, again, they pale in comparison to the unconscious patterns that impact us every day. Unconscious perceptions govern many of the most important decisions we make and have a profound effect on the lives of many people in many ways.

8 Ibid

SPECIAL CASE STUDY

Chubb

Chubb has built its solid reputation on one simple principle, "Never compromise integrity." This principle captures the spirit of Chubb, and the property, casualty and specialty insurance provider applies this same standard in its approach to diversity and inclusion within its organization.

According to Chubb, companies that perceive diversity as exclusively a moral imperative or societal goal are missing the larger point. Workforce diversity should be viewed as a competitive advantage and a business imperative, and only when companies approach diversity and inclusion in this way can they achieve a fully diverse and inclusive workforce.

The company believes that diversity is all about finding and developing the best talent, creating an inclusive work environment and achieving outstanding business results. Talent comes in many packages. The packages vary by race, age, gender, ethnicity, color, sexual orientation and disability. Diversity, for Chubb, is about recognizing, respecting and valuing these differences. But the company also appreciates that diversity is also about things that are not so tangible. Diversity is about differences in thinking styles, religious beliefs, education, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, among many variables.

In a true effort to create an environment where all employees can realize their fullest potential and in which the company can benefit from the competitive advantage diversity provides, Chubb offers trainings on various aspects of diversity, including how to recognize and address unconscious bias.

The first step in tackling workplace bias is to provide an open channel of communication for employees. Kathy Marvel, who serves as the company's Chief Diversity Officer, shares that Chubb provides easy access to employee relations personnel via a dedicated phone line called "Voice of the Employee." Callers can confidentially discuss issues that may require further investigation.

"In our leadership training program called the 'Leadership Development Seminar,' we have included a section on biases," Marvel explains. "This training allows participants to identify biases that they may hold and their impact on effective leadership."

During the past 18 months, Chubb has also piloted several versions of bias awareness training for its management teams. Additionally, "we have paired the bias awareness training with performance management training to help provide guidance on objectively linking performance with business goals, while managing the challenges we may face due to unconscious biases we may have," Marvel states. "The combined performance management / bias awareness session seems to be most effective, and we are determining how best to move forward with that format."

According to Marvel, any organization seeking to address unconscious bias discussions or training from within must do so carefully. "It may be misconstrued that an organization that is conducting bias training has uncovered biases in their practices, and this may make organizations reluctant to proceed with valuable training that may change behaviors. Each organization must assess that risk with their general counsel."

While the company has been participating in training, Marvel cautions that understanding and accepting one's biases is not an overnight process, nor a comfortable one. "Providing both team dialogue and personal reflection time is crucial for successful implementation," Marvel says.

The Résumé Study

A number of studies point directly to how unconscious decisions impact business decisions. Researchers at MIT and the University of Chicago have discovered that even names can unconsciously impact people's decision-making.[9] These researchers distributed 5,000 resumes to 1,250 employers who were advertising employment opportunities. The résumés had a key distinction in them: some were mailed out with names that were determined to be "typically white," others with names that were "typically black." Every company was sent four resumes: one of each race that was considered an "average" résumé and one of each race that was considered "highly skilled."

Pre-interviews with company human resources employees had established that most of the companies were aggressively seeking diversity, a fact that seems more likely to have them lean toward somebody with a name that suggests a black candidate. And yet, the results indicated something else was occuring. Résumés with "typically white" names received 50 percent more callbacks than those with "typically black" names. There was another striking difference. While the highly skilled "typically white" named candidates received more callbacks than the average ones, there was virtually no difference between the numbers of callbacks received by highly skilled versus average "typically black" named candidates. Even more strikingly, *average "typically white" named candidates received more callbacks than highly skilled "typically black" named candidates!* [10]

The Affinity Bias Example

Unconscious patterns can play out in ways that are so subtle they are hard to spot. Imagine, for example, that you are conducting an interview with two people, we'll call them Sally and John. John reminds you of yourself when you were younger, or of someone you know and like. You have that sense of familiarity or "chemistry." You instantly like him, and though you are not aware of why, your mind generates justifications. ("He seems like a straightforward kind of guy. I like the way he 'holds' himself.") You ask him the first interview question and he hems and haws a bit. After all, it's an interview. He's nervous. Because you feel an affinity toward him, you pick up on his nervousness. You want to put him at ease. You say, "John, I know it's an interview, but there's nothing to be nervous about. Take a breath and let me ask the question again." John nails it this time and he's off and running to a great interview. The whole interaction took four seconds, yet it made a world of difference.

Then you sit down with Sally. There is nothing negative about her, just no real connection. It is a very "business-like" interaction. You ask her the first question and she's a little nervous too, but this time you don't pick up on it. This interview moves forward, but not quite as well as John's. The next day a co-worker asks you how the interviews went, and you respond: "John was great…open, easy to talk to. I think he'll be great with staff and clients." And your reply about Sally? "She's okay, I guess." Your perceptions about the interviews constitute your reality. You probably don't even remember the four-second interaction that changed John's entire interview. In fact, if somebody asks you, you would swear you conducted the interviews exactly the same way with the same questions. Your own role in influencing the outcomes was completely invisible to you, driven by your background of comfort with John.

9 Bertrand, Marianne and Mullainathan, Sendhil, Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination, University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, NBER and CEPR; MIT and NBER, 2004

10 Bertrand, Marianne and Mullainathan, Sendhil, Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination, University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, NBER and CEPR; MIT and NBER, 2004

IN FOCUS

Micro-Affirmations and Unconscious Bias

Mary P. Rowe, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management.

Micro-affirmations – apparently small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard-to-see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur wherever people wish to help others to succeed.

What Are Micro-Affirmations?

Micro-affirmations are tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening. Micro-affirmations lie in the practice of generosity, in consistently giving credit to others – in providing comfort and support when others are in distress, when there has been a failure at the bench, or an idea that did not work out, or a public attack. Micro-affirmations include the myriad details of fair, specific, timely, consistent and clear feedback that help a person build on strength and correct weakness.

I have come to believe that teaching and training about micro-affirmations may help an organization in several different ways:

The first effect is obvious – appropriately affirming the work of another person is likely both to help that person do well, and to help him or her to enjoy doing well.

The second effect is that consistent, appropriate affirmation of others can spread from one person to another – potentially raising morale and productivity. It helps everyone, men and women, people of color and Caucasians. It appears to be particularly helpful for department heads, and anyone who is senior to another person, to "model" affirming behavior.

The third effect is subtle, and deals with the point that it may be hard for a person to "catch" himself or herself unconsciously behaving inequitably. I may not always be able to "catch myself" behaving in a way that I do not wish to behave. But if I try always to affirm others in an appropriate and consistent way, I have a good chance of blocking behavior of mine that I want to prevent. Many micro-inequities are not conscious – but affirming others can become a conscious as well as unconscious practice that prevents unconscious slights.

Implications for Action

- Managers can and should pay attention to "small things."
- The principles of appreciative inquiry are relevant to micro-affirmations: "leading" rather than "pushing;" building on strength and success, rather than first identifying faults and weakness.
- Small things are especially important with respect to feelings. (Managers must be impartial about facts but it is often appropriate and helpful to affirm peoples' feelings.) As it happens, it is relatively easy for most people to practice and teach how to affirm feelings. This is important because the "mechanics" of affirmation are not trivial in human affairs – attitudes may follow behavior just as behavior may follow attitudes.
- Whenever a question is brought to us about how to change offensive behavior – our own behavior or that of another – we can teach the principles of changing behavior, and explore options about how to do it.

Excerpted with permission from an article by Mary Rowe: Micro-affirmations & Micro-inequities, Rowe, M. Journal of the International Ombudsman Association, Volume 1, Number 1, March 2008.

Now, imagine that same dynamic occurring in the way you:

- recruit people
- make hiring decisions
- conduct your initial orientation interview
- mentor employees (or not!)
- make job assignments
- give people training opportunities
- listen to people's ideas and suggestions
- make promotional choices
- give performance reviews
- decide organizational policy
- conduct marketing campaigns
- choose board members
- treat customers

…and literally hundreds of other choices, and you can see that we have an issue that dramatically impacts our organizations. And almost all of it can be invisible to us.

Unconscious Self-Perception and Performance

While it's clear that unconscious beliefs impact the way we perceive others, unconscious beliefs also impact how we view of ourselves and, as a result, our work performance. In a 1995 study by three psychology professors, a group of Asian-American female undergraduates were asked to fill out a brief questionnaire, then complete a math test. The women were split into three groups. The first group was given a "female identity salient" questionnaire designed to activate the gender identity of the tester. The second group's questionnaire was designed to activate the Asian cultural identity of the tester. And the third group was a control group whose questionnaire had no conscious focus.

Based on these different questionnaires, participants in the group that answered the "Asian salient" questionnaire performed at the highest level, 54%, while the control group averaged 49% and the "female identity salient" group had only 42%. The positive stereotypes about Asians in math seem to have had an "encouraging" impact on the first group, while the negative stereotypes about women and math may have had a suppressing impact on the group that was focused on their gender identity.

"Confirmational" behavior

We make decisions largely in a way that is designed to confirm beliefs that we already have. This phenomenon of "confirmational behavior" occurs unconsciously in both positive and negative ways.

Our thoughts and decisions are constantly influenced by widely held stereotypes. Imagine, for example, that you have an ingrained unconscious belief that "young Hispanic men are lazy" (as untrue as that stereotype might be). How do you manage a young Hispanic man who reports to you? What actions are you likely to take? Isn't it likely that you will have a tendency to micro-manage him? Are you more or less likely to invest in developing him? Are you more or less likely to put him on high level assignments? Are you more or less likely to introduce him to significant players in the organization? When he makes a mistake, are you more or less likely to accept his explanation?

The answers are apparent. As a result of your stereotype and consequent actions, the employee would become frustrated, perhaps even angry. He would become resigned and lose motivation. He might leave, but, then again, having experienced the same kind of treatment in other places, he might believe that this is "just the way it is" and stay while "going through the motions" on his job. In other words, he would behave in a way that appears "lazy" to you, further confirming your erroneous stereotype.

> **"Time and again, the research shows that interviews are poor predictors of job performance because we tend to hire people we think are similar to us rather than those who are objectively going to do a good job."**

-Ori Brafman, quoted in "Overcoming the 'Sway' in Professional Life". The New York Times. July 15, 2008.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/15/jobs/15shift.html

On the other hand, take "John" from the interview mentioned earlier. For some reason, you believe in him. He reminds you of yourself when you were younger. How do you treat him? You show a deep interest in his career. You introduce him to all of the "right" people. You make sure he gets key job assignments for upward mobility. If people express concerns about him, you say: "Don't worry. He's a good kid. I'll talk to him." Not because you are helping him, but because you really see him as more competent. The impact? John flourishes. In fact, two years later the announcement comes out: John has been appointed a director, the youngest person ever to get such an appointment. And your response? "Boy, am I a good judge of talent, or what?"

Our patterns of belief and their impact are so deeply ingrained, and so concealed in our unconscious, it becomes difficult for us to fully understand their impact on our decision-making. Our minds automatically justify our decisions, blinding us to the true source, or beliefs, behind our decisions. Ultimately, we believe our decisions are consistent with our conscious beliefs, when in fact, our unconscious is running the show.

The Organizational Unconscious

Unconscious behavior is not just individual; it influences organizational culture as well. This explains why so often our best attempts at creating corporate culture change with diversity efforts seem to fall frustratingly short; to not deliver on the promise they intended.

Organizational culture is more or less an enduring collection of basic assumptions and ways of interpreting things that a given organization has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its internal and external influences. Unconscious organizational patterns, or "norms" of behavior, exert an enormous influence over organizational decisions, choices, and behaviors. These deep-seated company characteristics often are the reason that our efforts to change organizational behavior fail. Despite our best conscious efforts, the "organizational unconscious" perpetuates the status quo and keeps old patterns, values, and behavioral norms firmly rooted.

"Flexible work" arrangements are one area in which the conflict between our conscious choices and the "organizational unconscious" is coming to a head. Flexible work arrangements – alternative arrangements or schedules that deviate from the traditional working day and/or week – are often established to allow employees, especially parents, to meet personal or family needs. In principle the policy makes business sense and may even draw a lot of corporate and employee support. Turnover among young, talented parents can cause an organization to lose some of its best employees and cost hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of dollars in replacement costs. Thus, many organizations have a flexible work policy clearly articulated in the employee manual.

SPECIAL CASE STUDY

Weyerhaeuser

For Weyerhaeuser, one of the world's largest forest products companies, ensuring an environment that is truly diverse and inclusive is a top priority. So when the company made the important decision to look into combating unconscious bias within its corporate walls, the move made perfect sense.

"What we are trying to do here is build a more diverse and inclusive culture at Weyerhaeuser," states Effenus Henderson, the company's Chief Diversity Officer.

In Henderson's view, unconscious bias can and will show up in many areas of the workplace. Unconscious bias can show up in hiring, promotions or even in daily interactions around the office.

A critical part of addressing unconscious bias is in first recognizing and acknowledging that it exists. "You have to be able to recognize the kinds of issues or situations where people feel disrespected and devalued and look for those subtleties that other people might not always look for," explains Henderson.

Weyerhaeuser's managers are expected to encourage women, minorities, veterans, and individuals with disabilities to apply for positions for which they are qualified. Further, the company's leaders are expected to maintain a work environment that supports the success of all employees. Each member of the company's senior management team, for example, develops an action plan based on his or her individual diversity leadership assessment and is held accountable for follow through.

Weyerhaeuser understands that creating a company that is truly diverse and inclusive takes time and requires discipline, high expectations and accountability. The company takes great pains to ensure that it continues to improve upon its reputation for being an employer of choice. It is for this very reason that Weyerhaeuser diligently works to ensure bias is proactively addressed within the organization.

"I think it is important to recognize that bias exists, and you must coach leaders in a way that will allow them to recognize it," asserts Henderson. "This will help them build inclusive behaviors that help recognize things that exist in all of us that can at times get in the way of being inclusive and respectful of others."

In addition to some of the blatant ways that bias manifests itself, there are many subtle ways in which unconscious bias appears. Unconscious bias, Henderson points out, can show up in generational differences within the workplace. Younger workers may make assumptions about older workers, and vice versa, leading to unconscious, yet impactful, attitudes and actions. The same goes for assumptions across – and within – racial and ethnic groups, as well as management levels.

"We did a survey amongst our company employees to see what they thought about [unconscious bias] and how they thought it showed up, and the feedback we got back from them was that employees felt that managers who didn't mention diversity did not have an interest in the topic or a stake in the topic," Henderson shares. "At Weyerhaeuser, we know that there is no easy framework for this, but what we have tried to do is create a culture within our organization where people feel included and where our management team is held accountable when we fall short of this."

> **“Each one of us has some groups with which we consciously feel uncomfortable, even as we castigate others for feeling uncomfortable with our own groups. These conscious patterns of discrimination are problematic, but, again, they pale in comparison to the unconscious patterns that impact us every day. Unconscious perceptions govern many of the most important decisions we make and have a profound effect on the lives of many people in many ways. ...Unconscious patterns can play out in ways that are so subtle they are hard to spot.”**

Howard Ross
Founder & Chief Learning Officer of Cook Ross Inc., a diversity training and change management firm based in Silver Spring, Md.

However, when employees actually take advantage of flexible work policies, they can often be viewed by others – including coworkers, bosses, and company leadership – as a “less committed,” “less valuable,” or “less desirable” member of the team. The “official rules” say that flexible work arrangements are acceptable, but in actuality a conflict exists. While the organization consciously acknowledges that offering flexible work arrangements is the “right” thing to do and may even help increase retention and employee satisfaction, the organizational unconscious believes differently. Unconsciously, the organization’s culture of fear and mistrust pervades: fear that the company will ultimately lose productivity and revenue through flexible work arrangements, and mistrust that employees are misusing the policy and “cutting corners” in terms of time requirements.

Conflicts such as this can leave employees frustrated by the feeling that their leaders and the company as a whole are disingenuous in their statements, when in actuality the leaders may not see the conflict themselves.

How to Deal With Unconscious Bias in the Workplace … For Better or For Worse

Given the enormous impact of unconscious patterns on both our individual behavior and on organizational behavior, the question becomes, “How do we begin to see the organizational unconscious, and what can we do about it?” How do we engage in a seemingly contradictory path…consciously becoming aware of and addressing something that is, by nature, concealed?

There are a number of strategies that will help us create workplace cultures in which employees can actively “unconceal” perceptions and patterns that have been hidden. According to the Level Playing Field Institute, a San Francisco based nonprofit which studies, identifies and removes hidden biases from the classroom to the board room, there are steps each of us can take to mitigate our hidden bias.

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Corporate Leavers Survey Findings

The Corporate Leavers Survey, a national study conducted by the Level Playing Field Institute in 2007, shows that each year more than 2 million professionals and managers voluntarily leave their jobs solely due to unfairness, costing U.S. employers $64 billion in turnover annually. Among the findings were:

• Persons of color are more than three times more likely to leave solely due to unfairness in the workplace than heterosexual, Caucasian men.

• Respondents who said unfairness was the only reason for leaving their job were most likely to cite the following specific forms of unfair conduct: (1) being asked to attend more recruiting or community related events than others because of one's race, gender, religion or sexual orientation, (2) being passed over for a promotion due to one's personal characteristics, (3) being publicly humiliated and (4) being compared to a terrorist in a joking or serious manner.

• 24% percent who experienced unfairness said their experience "strongly" discouraged them from recommending their employer to other potential employees. Similarly, 13% said their experience "strongly" discouraged them from recommending their employer's products or services to others.

• Respondents to the survey also expressed differing opinions on which actions their employers could have taken to convince them to stay. Fair compensation was the most important factor for heterosexual Caucasian men and women, while almost half (43 percent) of gays and lesbians would have been "much more likely" to stay if they were offered better benefits. More than one-third of people of color (34 percent) indicated they would have likely stayed if their employer had better management who recognized their abilities.

For more information about the Corporate Leaver Survey and the Level Playing Field Institute, please visit www.corporateleavers.org, www.lpfi.org or email info@lpfi.org.

Level Playing Field Institute Presents:

How to Make it Safer to Talk About Race, Age & Gender in the Workplace

Intercontinental Hotel
888 Howard Street, San Francisco
Thursday, September 4, 2008
12:00p – 1:30p

For more information, contact Martha Kim at martha@lpfi.org or by phone at (415) 946-3027.

> **The unconscious is playing a political role this year, for the evidence is overwhelming that most Americans have unconscious biases both against blacks and against women in executive roles. ...Experiments have shown that the brain categorizes people by race in less than 100 milliseconds (one-tenth of a second), about 50 milliseconds before determining sex. And evolutionary psychologists believe we're hard-wired to be suspicious of people outside our own group, to save our ancestors from blithely greeting enemy tribes of cave men. In contrast, there's no hard-wired hostility toward women, though men may have a hard-wired desire to control and impregnate them. Yet racism may also be easier to override than sexism. For example, one experiment found it easy for whites to admire African-American doctors; they just mentally categorized them as "doctors" rather than as "blacks." Meanwhile, whites categorize black doctors whom they dislike as "blacks." ...The challenge for women competing in politics or business is less misogyny than unconscious sexism: Americans don't hate women, but they do frequently stereotype them as warm and friendly, creating a mismatch with the stereotype we hold of leaders as tough and strong. ...Many experiments have found that women have trouble being perceived as both nice and competent.**

Nicholas D. Kristof, "Our Racist, Sexist Selves." The New York Times. April 6, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/opinion/06kristof.html

Top 10 Ways to Combat Hidden Bias

1. Recognize that as human beings, our brains make mistakes without us even knowing it. The new science of "unconscious bias" applies to how we perceive other people. We're all biased and becoming aware of our own biases will help us mitigate them in the workplace.
2. Reframe the conversation to focus on fair treatment and respect, and away from discrimination and "protected classes". Review every aspect of the employment life cycle for hidden bias – screening resumes, interviews, onboarding, assignment process, mentoring programs, performance evaluation, identifying high performers, promotion and termination.
3. Ensure that anonymous employee surveys are conducted company-wide to first understand what specific issues of hidden bias and unfairness might exist at your workplace. Each department or location may have different issues.
4. Conduct anonymous surveys with former employees to understand what were the issues they faced, what steps could be taken for them to consider coming back, whether they encourage or discourage prospective employees from applying for positions at your company and whether they encourage or discourage prospective customers/clients from using your company's products or services.
5. Offer customized training based upon survey results of current and former employees that includes examples of hidden bias, forms of unfairness that are hurtful and demotivating, and positive methods to discuss these issues..
6. Offer an anonymous, third-party complaint channel such as an ombudsperson; since most of the behaviors that employees perceive as unfair are not covered by current laws – e.g. bullying, very subtle bias – existing formal complaint channels simply don't work.
7. Initiate a resume study within your industry, company and/or department to see whether resumes with roughly equivalent education and experience are weighted equally, when the names are obviously gender or race or culturally distinct.
8. Launch a resume study within your company and/or department to reassign points based on earned accomplishments vs. accidents of birth – e.g. take points off for someone who had an unpaid internship, add points for someone who put him/herself through college.
9. Support projects that encourage positive images of persons of color, GLBT and women. Distribute stories and pictures widely that portray stereotype-busting images – posters, newsletters, annual reports, speaker series, podcasts. Many studies show that the mere positive image of specific groups of people can combat our hidden bias.
10. Identify, support and collaborate with effective programs that increase diversity in the pipeline. Reward employees who volunteer with these groups, create internships and other bridges, and celebrate the stories of those who successfully overcome obstacles.

Many companies also choose to undergo an organizational diversity audit. Most organizational audits assess the conscious layers of organizational behavior. What do people think, believe, and see about what's going on in the organization?

What Does All of This Mean?

An awareness of unconscious bias requires us to fundamentally rethink the way we approach diversity work on a number of different levels. We have focused a great deal of attention on trying to find ways for people, especially those in the dominant groups, to "get" diversity. The challenge is that "getting it," on a conscious level, may have little or no impact on our unconscious beliefs and, more importantly, behavior. Our knowledge of unconscious bias makes several things abundantly clear:

- The limiting patterns of unconscious behavior are not restricted to any one group. All of us have them, and those of us who are diversity professionals particularly have to focus on our own assumptions and biases if we expect to have the moral authority to guide others in acknowledging and confronting theirs.

- A person who behaves in a non-exclusive or even discriminatory way does not have to have negative intent. When we approach people who view themselves as good individuals trying to do the right thing as if they "should have known better," we are likely to be met with resistance. If we approach them with an assumption of innocence in intent, but with an emphasis on the impact of their behavior, we are more likely to reach them effectively and garner their willing attention.

- Finally, we should not rely on any sense of subjective determinations of attitude, either individually or collectively, to determine whether our organizations are functioning in inclusive ways. Our conscious attitudes may have little to do with our success in producing results. We have to create objective measurements that give us individual and collective feedback on our performance if we are to create organizations that are truly inclusive.

Formal audits and evaluations also assess people's sense of how the culture is operating outside of their personal experience and look at indicators (metrics) that might identify how intentions and values are really expressed, thereby revealing the patterns of the organizational unconscious.

An understanding of unconscious bias is an invitation to a new level of engagement about diversity issues. It requires awareness, introspection, authenticity, humility, and compassion. And most of all, it requires communication and a willingness to act.

About Cook Ross, Inc.

Cook Ross, Inc. is a nationally recognized, woman-owned consulting firm founded in 1989. For nearly 20 years, Cook Ross, Inc. has provided diversity and cultural competency solutions through its training, consulting products and services to hundreds of organizations across 47 of the 50 United States, and 10 countries outside of the U.S.

We view diversity as a powerful resource that can be globally acknowledged and managed to create unprecedented learning and growth as well as an issue of legal compliance and awareness. We believe that attention to diversity, if done well, can improve productivity, morale, work satisfaction, creativity, internal and external communication, leadership, satisfaction in the communities that are being served, and profitability.

Our methodology is built around a transformative approach to Diversity and Inclusion Consulting – Re-Inventing Diversity for the 21st Century©. This approach creates sustainable change in organizations by replacing race-based, US-centric, 'us vs. them' diversity training with a systems model that explores globalism, cultural intelligence and cultural flexibility, inherent human tendency toward bias, and unconscious organizational patterns that exist which impact the way employees, vendors, and customers from different cultures, ages, and backgrounds all relate to each other.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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