

Module 1: What is Unconscious Bias?

As you begin your journey, there are likely to be several questions on your mind such as, “What is unconscious bias?”, “Who has unconscious bias?”, “Why is this important?”, “How do I discover my unconscious bias?” Before explaining or defining unconscious bias, let’s first look at some commonly held ideas about unconscious bias. For each of the following statements, choose your response – true or false – to determine your level of understanding on this important topic. Some of these statements may represent thoughts or ideas that have crossed your mind at some point in time.

Unless otherwise noted, all myths are adapted from [“Myth Busters” by the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University \(r1\)](#).*

SAMPLES INCLUDED HERE.

Now that you’ve had the opportunity to dispel various myths about unconscious bias, you might be wondering, “What’s in it for me?” or “Why should I care?”- As some of the myths have shown, unconscious bias occurs in individuals and affects several areas of the workforce, such as in interviewing and promotions. It can also affect the workplace, such as how you behave toward others and how others behave toward you.

During this course, you will see that despite your best intentions, everyone is susceptible to bias in one or more areas. Your biases may lead you (consciously or unconsciously) to advantage some people and disadvantage others regardless of merit. Obviously, that has serious implications for the Company and our workforce. By comparison, when individuals and managers mitigate unconscious bias there are several positive impacts including the following:

- Improved ability to recruit, hire and retain talent
- Improved fairness in employee evaluations and opportunities for promotion
- Improved employee and managerial productivity
- Improved decision-making and ability to solve complex problems
- Improved teamwork with resulting operational efficiencies
- Increased trust between managers and their teams and between team members thereby reducing unnecessary conflict and disrespectful or uncivil conduct.
- From all of the above, a more welcoming and inclusive work environment for all Department managers and employees.

Throughout this module you will explore the science of unconscious bias, the dynamics of unconscious bias, factors that may cause bias, and the ways that bias shows up in the work environment.

1. Defining Bias

Bias is defined as a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair:

This course focuses on two forms of bias: cognitive and unconscious. Research shows that these biases have the potential to impact the ways you work with and understand others. For managers and supervisors, bias also affects leadership, management, and decisions related to hiring, promotions and performance assessment.

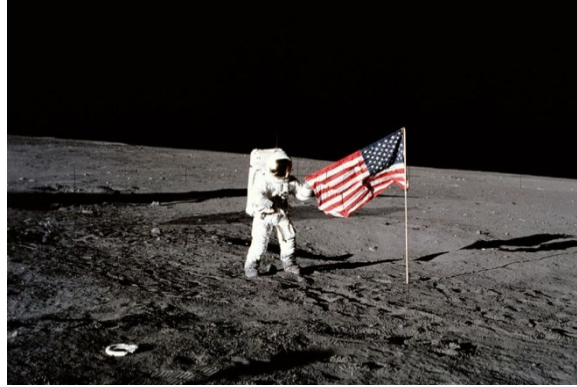
Cognitive Bias

Cognitive bias is the phenomenon where people use flawed judgment to assess data, make assumptions and reach decisions. Those flaws are caused by the brain's tendency to be biased. In its attempts to simplify information processing, the brain can rely on shortcuts that lead to poor decisions and bad judgments.

For example, if you toss a coin ten times and it comes up heads every time, you might believe it is more likely to come up tails the next time. This is an example of a cognitive bias because the odds of the coin coming up heads or tails is always 50/50.



As another example, a number of people believed that NASA's lunar landings were fake due to the images of the astronauts with a flag 'waving' in the background. Cognitive bias leads these people to associate this pattern – a flag waving – with a windy day, and therefore to believe that the photo could not have been from the moon itself (where there is no wind). They did not factor in the folds in the flag before deployment, the use of a bar to hold the flag out, or the actions of the astronauts to stretch out the flag.



**Unconscious
Bias**

Unconscious bias is a term used to describe people who make assumptions about sub-groups - not confined to sub-groups that are underrepresented or minorities -within society. While not conscious of those assumptions or the impact they have on your behavior and reasoning, you make these assumptions and decisions without awareness.

For example, a study published by the *National Bureau of Economic Research (c2) found that math teachers gave girls lower grades than boys when they could see their names on their test papers. This is an example of an unconscious bias that does not associate girls with the ability to do math.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What types of things do you do that are mostly unconscious to you?

Reveal:

Breathing, blinking, writing, walking, using utensils, driving a car, and typing are all examples of things we do on a daily basis that are mostly done unconsciously.