

Combatting Unconscious Bias in Recruitment

Best Practice advice on how to address uncomfortable situations during your Hiring process, so you can achieve your recruitment Diversity and Inclusion goals.



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Contents

1. Bias in Recruitment
2. Addressing Potential Unconscious Bias
3. The Impact on your Recruitment
4. Your Essential Recruitment Stack
5. The Right Process for you?
6. Applying the Learning
7. Removing Unconscious Bias with Vacancy Filler

1. Bias in Recruitment

Within the HR and Recruitment space, occasionally a “horror story” will appear where an employer asks for applicants with certain physical attributes to apply, or specifies the desired age of applicants in an advert. These are easily avoidable, and more importantly they’re easily corrected.

Implicit, or unconscious, bias is where decision making is influenced by factors that a person isn’t aware of and may even be a direct contradiction to their beliefs and values. By its very nature, unconscious bias is almost impossible to self-identify, which makes it a challenging topic to approach, and even more so to correct.

Unconscious bias is a shortcut to a decision, often with the best intention. As humans, professionals in environments where relationships are everything to us, we seek to find common ground, bonding over a shared interest like an alma mater, a hobby or a sports team. All informing an unconscious bias which makes us more likely to move towards hiring someone in our own image.

2. Addressing Potential Unconscious Bias

Whilst it may prove challenging to identify specific examples of unconscious bias, there are many ways to remove the potential for it during your recruitment process. Whilst identifying or even preventing bias in any form may not be a comfortable discussion, it's an incredibly important one. Challenging our own bias, or the behaviours of our teams and colleagues is never easy. Through education we are able to eradicate opportunities for bias we may not have previously considered.

One striking observation when researching this article was the breadth of opportunity for unconscious bias, which include but aren't limited to:

Affinity bias: unconscious tendency to favour those with the same or similar characteristics to ourselves

Confirmation bias: unconscious attempts to seek and recall information to confirm our preconceived beliefs

Attribution bias: unconscious judgement of behaviour and information based on our personal feelings at the time

Conformity bias: unconscious support and agreement with those in our social or professional circles

The Halo or Horns effect: the unconscious belief that a particular characteristic has a direct bearing on the general "goodness" or "badness" of an individual

Contrast effect: unconscious comparison of individual qualities and/or credentials based on something we've seen and heard.

Consciously noting the potential influences, or occasions where we may have unknowingly made a decision due to any of the above is a strong starting point when looking at opportunities to improve and correct our practise and process.

3. The Impact on your Recruitment (and revenue)

The WSJ reported that the most diverse companies on the S&P 500 outperform their less diverse competitors over both 5 and 10 year periods. A diverse workforce isn't just about doing the right thing, it's about finding the right people to stay ahead of the curve, competition and targets.

The cost of hiring the wrong person differs between businesses, with estimates ranging from 2.5 times the employee's annual salary to "well over \$100 million" in example 2.

In my opinion, the beauty of removing unconscious bias from your recruitment is that you are able to achieve a covetable win – win scenario: where doing the right thing is rewarded.

4. Your Essential Recruitment Stack

Staying mindful of the power and critical impact of recruitment decisions, there are a whole host of useful tools ready to empower you with a fair, conscientious and equal recruitment journey: .

1. Applicant Tracking System/ATS (I wholeheartedly endorse Vacancy Filler should you need a superior Applicant Tracking System)
2. An accessible Careers Page/Site
3. Online accessible Application Forms
4. Job Boards
5. Bias Checker
6. Blind Application Process
7. Confidential Shortlisting
8. Consistent Screening Questions
9. BI Reporting Suite

By taking control of your recruitment, unifying both candidate journey and experience with an Applicant Tracking System guided by the oversight and direction of your HR and Recruitment teams, you are able to set the parameters and expectations for applicants and colleagues alike.

Putting the Vacancy Filler ATS at the centre of the process enables you to report on your progress in real time, pull big data analytics and make efficiencies based on trend or impact.

5. The Right Process for you

Taking the suggested tech stack as a framework, the next step is creating a process that is both true to your employer brand, and your Diversity and Inclusion goals. From the offset, acknowledge what you want to achieve. If you are struggling with a balance of genders across the company or in certain role types, be upfront with candidates. If you would like to increase the number of candidates from BAME backgrounds, let all of your applicants know. Statistically, the vast majority of applicants want an inclusive recruitment experience.

Let your applicants know that you want the same, and you will start receiving more applications

5. Applying the Learning

Whilst every organisation is different, and every applicant is unique, there are some universal processes which will quickly move you closer to where you want to be.

Careers Site: This is the equivalent to your shop front. Showcase your vision and values

Job Adverts: Scrutinise your adverts, use an online service (or perhaps ask Vacancy Filler to check them for bias)

Job Boards: Advertise across a range of job boards, keep listings in front of paywalls and in accessible places

Accessible Forms: Ensure applicants have a great experience applying for your roles by ensuring your whole process is compliant with your disability accessibility protocol as well as all digital devices

Blind Applications: Assure candidates their protected criteria and personal information will be redacted from recruitment decision making. Advise them that their anonymised data will inform your D&I statistics and nothing else (Vacancy Filler allows this currently)

Confidential Shortlisting: Prevent the sharing of information about shortlisted candidates between conferring colleagues (Vacancy Filler enables this)

Consistent Screening Questions: Ask every applicant the same questions in order to accurately gauge the strength of the responses

Business Intelligence Analytics: A pillar of Vacancy Filler. Report on metrics and improvements in real time. Ensure decision-making is based on accurate information. Stay informed and in control.

The CIPD advise that gathering Diversity and Inclusion data from employees could amount to a breach of mutual trust. Therefore, we need to gather information from candidates prior to them becoming our colleagues. Ensure your application process accommodates for this initially, and not as an afterthought.

By taking advantage of the tech at our disposal, we are able to drastically impact the inclusivity of our recruitment process, improving the fairness of our process, and safeguarding against any biased behaviours that have the potential to have an impact on the recruitment process.

6. Remove Unconscious Bias with Vacancy Filler

All of the suggested processes and technologies are available with Vacancy Filler today. With powerful automation, engaging and branded communication and analytics against every available data point, Vacancy Filler gives you everything you need to build an unbiased recruitment process.

Concern around equality and fairness will always be a huge part of our roles within HR and Recruitment. However, by letting Vacancy Filler do the heavy lifting in terms of unconscious bias, we ensure that your process is a little bit more inclusive with each efficiency and you move closer and closer to your goals with each adjustment.

As the saying frequently attributed to numerous names from Henry Ford to Mark Twain reads, “if you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten”. Here’s to making things fairer and being rewarded by the improved output, productivity and profit a more diverse workforce naturally creates.

We all learn from each other and from sharing our ideas, inspirations and successes. Collaborative innovation is something we pride ourselves in at Vacancy Filler, where we’re always available to help you out.

Here are some additional materials from our customer base and beyond for best practice, advice and continued learning:

<https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/anti-racism-and-allyship-in-the-workplace-a-brief-guide>
<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk>
<https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/Interview%20-%20Equality%20in%20Employment.pdf>
<https://hbr.org/2019/06/how-to-reduce-personal-bias-when-hiring>
<https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/types-of-unconscious-bias>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-in-the-workplace-the-mcgregor-smith-review>
<https://www.thehrsource.com/post/5-types-of-unconscious-bias-in-the-workplace>

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(3) <https://www.eurekamoments.net/if-you-always-do/#:~:text=If%20you%20always%20do%20what,is%20the%20point%20it%20makes>
<https://www.eurekamoments.net/if-you-always-do/#:~:text=If%20you%20always%20do%20what,is%20the%20point%20it%20makes>

Thank you for reading.

Please feel free to get in touch with Miriam to discuss any D&I challenges you have, to book a personalised demonstration or if you want to have a chat more on Unconscious Bias.

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