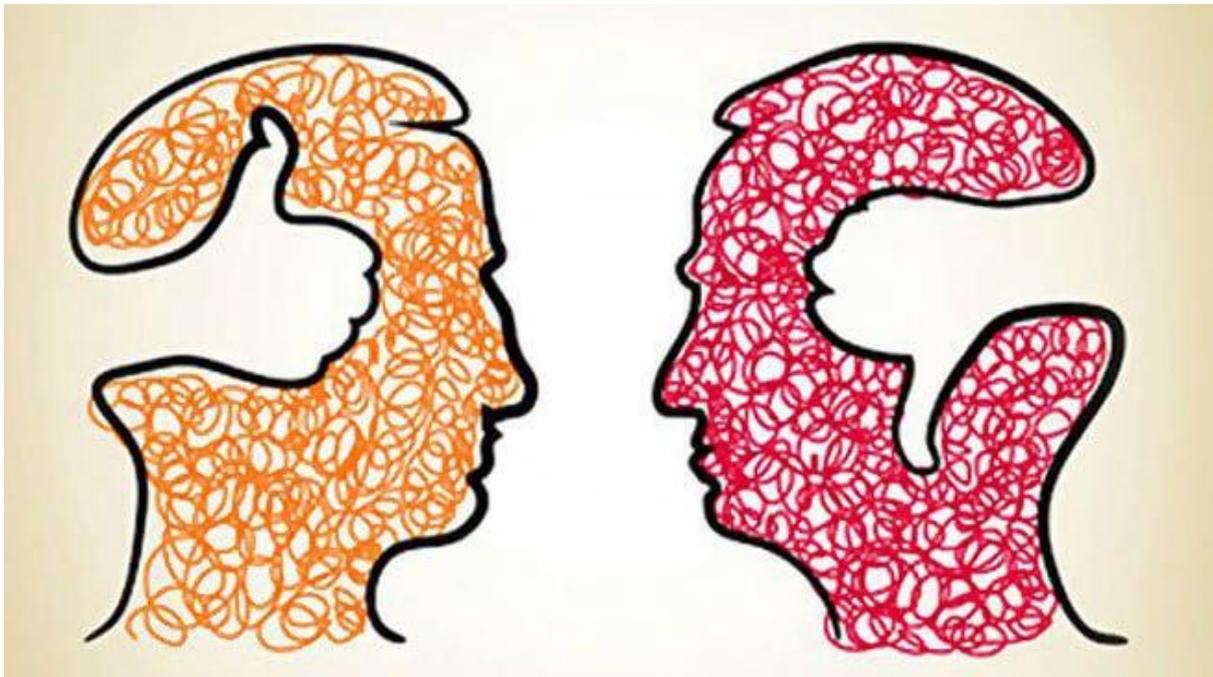


## YOUR CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS BIASES CAN CREATE AN UNFAIR WORLD



Whether we like to admit to it or not, all of us harbor both Conscious and Unconscious Biases of some form. It's difficult to own up to this fact, especially as we live in societies that advocate against discrimination and there are laws that have been created to prevent discrimination, but we all struggle to escape the underlying Biases that influence how we perceive and treat others.

Bias has been defined as a specific inclination, idea or feeling about someone that is preconceived as unreasonable. Often Biases are based on physical attributes like Age, Gender, Skin colour that can be recognized easily and immediately and have very little or nothing to do with the individual's personality or professional experiences. Unconscious Biases are even more difficult to determine as they exist in our subconscious minds and are invariably triggered automatically without our awareness based on impressions in our unconscious minds caused by our Past Experiences, Social Backgrounds, Likes and Dislikes and our Cultural Contexts.

### **Biases Adversely Impact Rationale for Decision Making**

Most of us like to believe that we are ethical, upfront and unbiased. Infact, we understand Biases only when it comes to the Biases of others, and also when we have been at the receiving end of a Bias.

We all imagine we are good decision makers, able to objectively evaluate a candidate whether for Hiring, for Promotions, or when we allocate a plum Assignment or find someone suitable to do business with. We like to believe that we could be counted on to

deliver a fair unbiased rational conclusion that is in the organization's best interest. However more than two decades of research amply proves that in reality most of us fall woefully short of our own inflated self perception.

### **How does Unconscious Biases occur?**

Every Second our Brain is hit by 11 million pieces of information of which the Brain can process only 40 pieces – This means that 99.999996% of the information is processed by our Unconscious Mind. The brain tends to filter information and process facts to arrive at snap judgements based on our childhood experiences, family networks, religion, nationality, life experiences both negative and positive etc. Biases are actually an outcome of our Brain taking a shortcut to rational thinking that delivers information often far from reality.

Conscious and Unconscious Biases can impact our attitudes and reactions towards certain people, it can affect how receptive or friendly we are with certain people and how we can be restrained if we feel on our guard with some people.

When hiring someone for a job, making friends, or identifying someone for a plum project, Bias influences every decision we make about others often preventing some people from accessing professional opportunities like others, and these lost opportunities can cost organizations financially and is often the greatest source of stress and unhappiness within organizations.

Our subconscious influences the way we make sense of the world around us... We are all Biased and it Matters. There are upto 150 types of identified Biases. Here is a short list of the most common ones you will resonate with -

1. Affinity or Like Me Bias – Affinity Bias occurs when you unconsciously prefer someone because they remind you of yourself. This is most common when hiring someone – similar educational background, socio-economic class, schools, place of origin, community can all play a significant role in creating an instant affinity. Similar Functional background/ experiences can also impact socio-cognitive diversity that organizations may require for certain Projects and can adversely impact Innovation.
2. The Beer Test - which is actually used by some organizations as part of selection, where a potential candidate is invited out for a drink to test his/her social compatibility and cultural fit with the organization. This works as a Bias when we tend to hire people who we would actually like to socialize with.
3. Confirmation Bias - is when we specifically look for evidence to support what the brain has already concluded within the first 40 seconds of meeting someone. This Bias occurs when preconceived assumptions result in selective observation that do not allow us to appreciate the person in full perspective.
4. Halo & Horne Effects – the Halo effect occurs when we focus on one particularly great attribute and presume or extend it to other attributes. For example, if

someone is good looking we presume they are also competent. Conversely if they are not well dressed we may presume they are also not competent, which is the Horne effect.

5. Availability Heuristic – is the error of recency. It's when our perception is coloured by recent events rather than being able to see the whole picture in perspective. This Bias plays out in organizations especially in the context of Performance Evaluation, where often the most recent performances colours the perception of performance through the entire year!
6. Group Think – is when the desire for harmony and conformity creates a pressure for consensus instead of enabling diverse ideas. Group think is the most commonly found Bias within organizations and easily impacts Problem solving, Decision making and Innovation. Group think also impacts Interview Panels making a decision together.
7. Peak End Rule – is a psychological heuristic in which people judge an experience based on how they feel at its Peak and at its end – rather than basing this keeping the whole experience in perspective. This plays out in case of Customer Experience, our experience of Performance and can impact significant decisions we make based on that experience.
8. Negativity Bias – also known as negativity effect, is the tendency of the mind to remember what went wrong – it's the tendency to get more affected by things that are negative rather than positive, even when things of equal intensity occur. This can significantly impact how performance is perceived or evaluated whether during a Performance Reviews or when evaluating a candidate for Hiring/ Promotion etc.
9. Zeigarnik Effect – is when people have a tendency to remember incomplete or interrupted tasks better than completed ones. As you can see, this can impact how performances are evaluated or how Task completion may be assessed by Managers of teams. These are definitely difficult Managers to please or work for!!

### **So how can we deal with Biases?**

Understanding the types of biases can help us recognize our own Biases, especially the Conscious one and also where we may become victims of our own unconscious Biases. While eliminating Biases completely may seem like a difficult task, the reward is well worth the effort. Businesses with Diversity in the workplace achieve better results when it comes to productivity, profits and other business outcomes. This also makes companies more attractive Cultures to work for, help hire and retain top Talent and help companies establish a great reputation as Employers. Here are some ways you can deal with Biases at the workplace -

1. Get more conscious about Biases - Look for Patterns, look for the Contrary, embrace Diversity, use Data to bring objectivity and evidence to your decision-making,

communicating clearly, discussing and questioning. Decisions by encouraging Diatribe can help ensure there are no shortcuts to your thinking

2. Empower everyone to call out Unconscious Biases - This enables creating a more Conscious workplace where more people feel accountable for the decisions they make and have an opportunity to think through, use data, involve more perspectives to enable objectivity and fair decision making.
3. Hold people accountable for the quality of decisions made. Many Leadership Teams have begun including a Cognitive Bias Expert in the room to enable Biases to be called out and discussed openly and bring more objectivity and effectiveness to their Decision making process.
4. And lastly there has been a huge premium on Thinking fast in our society – its time. Like Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman says, we learn to Think Fast and Slow – The ‘Slow’ in our thinking enables us to bring brakes of objectivity to our thinking to create a more Fair and Equal world.



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