

### Unconscious Bias in the Brewery and a New Method to Minimize Its Impact

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#### Abstract

Unconscious biases are automatic behavior patterns and attitudes that unconsciously influence interactions with others. These behaviors can be rooted in sociocultural influences and personal experience. Unconscious biases can discourage personal growth and may create distance between people of different backgrounds, lifestyles, or abilities. The impacts can be seen in employee turnover and morale, representing increased production costs and lost time in recruiting and retraining talent. This article defines, characterizes, and provides examples of unconscious biases and their potential consequences in the brewery. The BIAS model is presented as an iterative training approach to reduce unconscious biases and their influence in the workplace. External educational resources also are provided.

#### Introduction

Unconscious bias, sometimes called implicit bias, refers to the automatic, unintentional attitudes and stereotypes that influence decision-making and behavior without conscious awareness. The brain is naturally inclined to form associations, seek patterns, and take shortcuts when processing information. These biases are deeply rooted in societal conditioning, cultural influences, and personal experiences, significantly impacting how individuals perceive and interact with others. In professional settings and beyond, this often results in unfair treatment or misguided decisions, as unconscious bias manifests in a variety of forms, such as implicit attitudes toward specific social groups. These biases are distinct from explicit prejudices and persist despite efforts to mitigate them, due to their subtle and pervasive nature (1).

Since the identification of unconscious bias in the mid-1990s, scholars have extensively studied its mechanisms and effects on decision-making and interpersonal relationships. Social identity theory demonstrates how individuals tend to associate positive traits with their in-groups and link negative stereotypes to out-groups, resulting in group thinking rather than individual assessment. Therefore, biases are essentially systematic errors in decision-making, and studies have shown that all humans possess implicit biases that affect reasoning and interactions with others (2).

The following discussion will delve deeper into the nature of unconscious bias and the variety of manifestations and impacts. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of how unconscious bias influences personal, professional, and community behaviors will lead to a discussion of effective strategies for mitigating its adverse effects.

#### Unconscious Biases and Their Impact

Bias is not just unconscious; it is nuanced. There are multiple types of unconscious bias, which makes it hard to be comprehensively aware of them, let alone address all of them. As society's awareness of short-

comings progresses, more may arise. The list below contains some of the well-known biases, with a reflection on their impact.

#### Types of Unconscious Biases

**Perception:** Forming judgements based on societal and cultural stereotypes associated with specific demographic groups.

**Affinity:** Inclination toward individuals with similar backgrounds can lead to exclusion of those who differ, influencing decision-making and relationships (2).

**Confirmation/Conformity:** Favoring information that aligns with preexisting beliefs leads to biased decision-making and interpretations, affecting various contexts (2).

**Gender:** Stemming from societal stereotypes, gender bias often leads to unequal treatment, perpetuating sexism. Despite progress, unconscious associations still influence behaviors towards the spectrum of gender (2).

**Race:** Deeply ingrained stereotypes result in unintentional racism, affecting behaviors and interactions. Despite rejecting racist beliefs consciously, individuals may exhibit biased reactions, highlighting the need for awareness and action (3).

**Sexuality:** Implicit biases influence attitudes toward different sexual orientations, impacting interactions and relationships. Gender differences may shape these biases, affecting perceptions and behaviors (4).

**Ageism:** Discrimination based on age, affecting both young and old, perpetuates stereotypes and prejudices. Awareness of age bias is crucial in combating discrimination in various domains (2).

**Socioeconomic Status:** Bias based on worth and societal judgment affects opportunities and perceptions, hindering social mobility and perpetuating inequalities (5).

**Physical Appearance:** Beauty, weight, and height biases influence perceptions and treatment, impacting areas like hiring and societal judgments (2).

**Neurodiversity:** Epistemic injustices marginalize neurodivergent individuals, hindering understanding and support in the workplace. Unconscious biases exacerbate disparities, necessitating awareness and accommodation efforts (6).

#### Impacts of Unconscious Biases

Workplace culture and interactions are shaped by the permeation of unconscious biases; some are more subtle than others. Microaggressions, fueled by these biases, are common occurrences that can go unaddressed. Microaggressions encompass verbal and nonverbal exchanges ranging from outright discrimination to subtle snubs or dis-

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missals of one’s thoughts and experiences. These small acts, whether intentional or not, can accumulate over time and contribute to the deterioration of individual and collective well-being in the workplace (7).

Microaggressions influence hiring and recruitment processes. In hiring, the imposition of unconscious biases leads to the selection of less-qualified candidates, favoring those who more closely align with leadership’s values. In turn, this undermines company productivity and performance by overlooking talented individuals or discriminating against those already employed. Hires, employees, and customers can be alienated by these microaggressions whether they are a receiver or an observer. The emotional toll can vary by impacting productivity, mental health, and stress-related illnesses and can expose the organization to legal and reputational risks. Employee morale is eroded, a company’s image is tarnished, and efforts to cultivate a diverse and inclusive workplace culture are undermined, stifling innovation and hindering organizational and community success (2).

### The BIAS Method

In the competitive market of beer production, reduction of indirect costs can have a significant impact on a brewery’s longevity. Employee turnover can represent increased production costs and lost time in recruiting and retraining talent. Refusing to understand self-biases can perpetuate ingrained behaviors that foster microaggressions and lower workplace morale. It, thus, is imperative to educate the workforce to minimize the impact of unconscious bias. Doing so requires an organized approach that allows individuals to know and interpret these biases and the knowledge gap that promotes them (8).

BIAS (Fig. 1) is an iterative model of discovery and training that seeks to educate the workforce and measure changes in unconscious biases. BIAS starts with “baseline,” gauging the knowledge of the workforce regarding unconscious bias. This step should be executed through anonymous testing to prevent unfair treatment. The organization itself shouldn’t be able to see individual responses of baseline tests. Us-

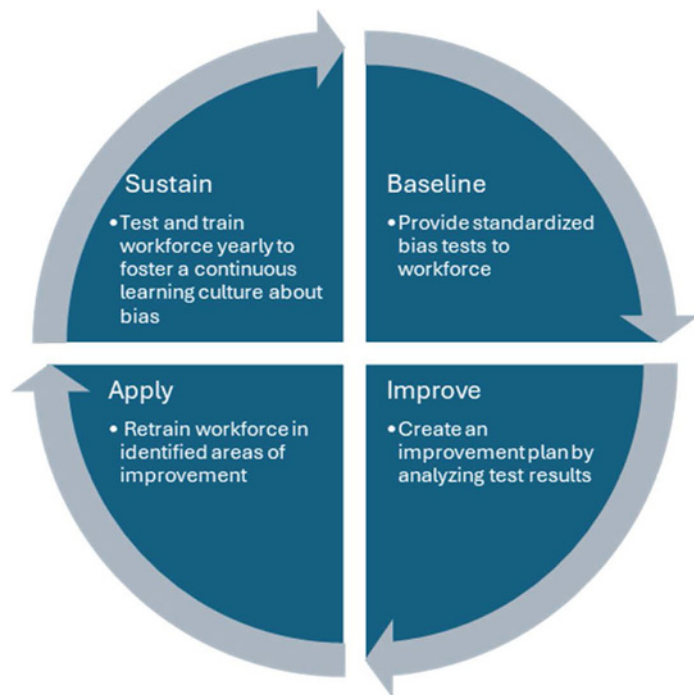


Figure 1. BIAS model of unconscious bias improvement.

ing a third-party organization to collect and anonymize data can accomplish this result. Once all data is collected, it is time to “improve,” a phase in which the conglomerated and anonymized data is analyzed to identify biases in the organization. The outcome is an improvement plan that seeks to provide training in the highest occurring biases. “Apply,” in which the workforce is educated in the areas identified in the improve step, is the crux of the BIAS model. The selected method of training will vary by organizational size and budgetary restrictions. However, the objective is to promote a reduction of bias-related behavior through targeted training. Maintaining an educated workforce can be achieved through the “sustain” step. This step focuses on recurring testing and training management to foster a cultural change that reduces intervention needs. It should be noted that the BIAS model does not seek to penalize unwanted behavior but to reduce it through andragogy. Building a culture that values empathy over discrimination. Furthermore, this culture change should start at the highest echelons of the organization to model the desired behavior and company culture to encourage a sustainable cultural change that is led by example.

### Benefits of Utilizing BIAS

Through the implementation of the BIAS model and commitment to ongoing education and awareness, brewing organizations can create a more equitable and effective workplace, leading to better business outcomes and benefits:

- **Enhanced Employee Morale and Engagement:** When employees feel valued and respected, regardless of their background or characteristics, they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their work.
- **Reduced Turnover:** More inclusive workplaces can lead to lower employee turnover, saving costs associated with recruiting and training.
- **Improved Team Collaboration:** Diverse teams that understand and appreciate each other’s differences tend to collaborate more effectively and innovatively.
- **Better Decision-Making:** Awareness of biases can lead to more objective decision-making processes when it comes to hiring, promoting, and daily operations.
- **Legal and Reputational Benefits:** Proactively addressing bias can help an organization avoid potential legal issues related to discrimination and enhance a reputation of inclusivity and fairness (9).

### Areas of Consideration

Unconscious bias tests are ever evolving and their effectiveness can vary. While selecting a single test method will produce a measurable baseline to determine training success, no single test is all encompassing (10). For that reason, testing methods should be reassessed on an ongoing basis.

In a cost-conscious era of brewing, providing specific training on all types of unconscious biases may be cost prohibitive. An alternative is to follow Pareto’s principle to identify the relatively small group of biases that are most prevalent. In addition, local universities can be contacted to gain access to quality educational resources in the area.

Unconscious biases can often be grouped in different ways to aid in visualizing concepts. This can lead to confusion about definitions. As

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a growing research area, it is recommended that organizations work with scholars and/or human resources specialists to select up-to-date content deemed effective.

## Conclusions

Unconscious biases are mechanisms used to aid in decision-making by leveraging previous experiences, learned behaviors, and/or culturally imprinted generalizations. These mechanisms also can result in negative behaviors that can alienate people or groups, create a segregated workforce, and decrease workplace happiness, which will impact a business's long-term sustainability. Learning about one's own unconscious biases can help reduce the impact these can have on the people surrounding us.

The BIAS model was created to provide an iterative process that uncovers existing biases in the workforce and provides targeted training to improve workforce cohesion in the long term. This model is presented as a wireframe and should be adjusted to the specific needs of the brewery (e.g., workforce size, funding, availability of educational resources). Leveraging local educational institutions is recommended to gain access to recent developments in the unconscious bias field and trustworthy resources.

## Resources

### Testing

[Harvard Implicit Association Test—Project Implicit Learning for Justice](#)

### Training

[EW Group](#)  
[Harvard Online](#)  
[Nonprofit Ready](#)

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