

DIVERSITY | Unconscious Bias: It's in our people and our processes

Recruitment expert Wyle Baoween outlines a three-step approach to overcoming unconscious bias

BY WYLE BAOWEEN

Are you biased? The uncomfortable truth is yes. "Most of us believe that we are ethical and unbiased. We imagine we're good decision makers, able to objectively size up a job candidate or a venture deal and reach a fair and rational conclusion that's in our, and our organization's best interests," states Harvard University researcher Mahzarin Banaji. However, decades of research shows that we all live with unconscious biases and they often conflict with our consciously held beliefs of who we are and what we stand for.

All day long our brains are making quick judgements and assessments of people and situations without us even being aware. This is "unconscious bias"; it's autopilot. At any one moment, we are faced with roughly 11 million pieces

of information but we can only consciously process 40. Meaning, we are in fact living 99.999996 per cent in our unconscious, according to Timothy Wilson, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia.

When it comes to hiring, these unconscious, snap decisions often correlate to a lack of diversity within an organization. According to new research by McKinsey, this lack of diversity has a direct impact on an organization's financial performance.

Everyone has biases; it's part of being human. Unconscious bias is influenced by our individual backgrounds and experiences and often more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure. So what can we do about it? Consider this three-step model:

Step 1

Awareness is an important first step. In order to tackle our unconscious bias, we first need to



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recognize that we have biases and identify what they are. The most effective tool available for this is the set of Harvard Implicit Biased Tests.

Step 2

Training is a helpful tool to facilitate awareness of unconscious bias. It starts to bring consciousness to the decisions we are making as individuals and as organizations. Investing in training also sends a message that tackling bias and fostering diversity is a business priority.

Awareness

Training

Technology

Step 3

Technology is a growing area in the world of unconscious bias. It is a practical way to address the biases that are embedded in our systems and processes. A number of new startups have launched in recent years, offering a range of tools from analyzing job postings for gender bias, to those that collect information on social networks to find and target diverse candidates, as well as tools that strip resumes of information that could discriminate against candidates in the screening process.

Are we biased? Yes. Can we bring awareness to our biases and implement tools to help make positive change? Yes. And in doing so, leaders can reap the benefits of a diverse team, and individuals receive fair and equitable treatment. **SB**

Wyle Baoween is CEO of HRx Technology, a Vancouver-based startup that provides technology solutions and services to address unconscious bias in hiring. He is also the founder of #FairGame, a community where like-minded people come together to discuss, raise awareness and influence positive change related to discrimination in hiring.

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