

# UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

JACKIE COOK, MD OF CQ STRATEGIC MARKETING AND FOUNDER OF EQUALITY IN STEM IS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO UNLTD AND CHAMPION OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE, PARTICULARLY IN THE STEM INDUSTRIES. HERE, SHE TALKS US THROUGH WHY IT IS SUCH A PROMINENT ISSUE IN THE WORKPLACE AND WHY IT IS ESSENTIAL IT IS ADDRESSED BY BUSINESS OWNERS.



**There is a lot of talk around EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) for businesses at the moment and how they can attract a more diverse workforce, particularly for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) industries that have traditionally been very white male-dominated sectors.**

“It’s always worked for us”, “Why do we need to change”, “It’s just the way it’s always been”, “Are you saying I’m sexist/racist (etc)”.

**So, why does it matter, why do we need to change?**

The workplace is seeing increasing skills shortages

but particularly in the STEM industries, if we are only recruiting from 50% of the population (male not female), never mind other areas of diversity then we are limiting the potential future employees.

A report by McKinsey back in 2015 shows that Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.

Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national

industry medians.

**What is unconscious bias and who is affected by it?**

Everyone experiences or feels some level of bias the key is to realise we don’t have to act on those biases. Often it can be uncomfortable to recognise we have bias and people avoid acknowledging them. Unconscious bias is unconscious, you don’t realise you are doing it, it can be something that’s ingrained in our culture, expectations and stereotypes. It can be social media, news, advertising, influence of friends and family or your childhood experiences.

The most common types of bias are the nine protected characteristics recognised in the Equality Act: age, disability, gender, pregnancy/maternity, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, race/colour/nationality/ethnicity, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership.

**How and where does unconscious bias happen in the workplace?**

During the recruitment process, decisions about promotions, decisions about who to put on a project, their capabilities or what workload someone can cope with, general conversations in the



workplace... everywhere.

**When you start looking into EDI and issues around bias you will hear the terms intersectionality and microaggressions, but what do they mean?**

Intersectionality is the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage can compound themselves. For example, a gay trans woman or a mixed-race neurodiverse woman may experience discrimination on many different levels.

Microaggressions are actions, behaviours, comments in the everyday that subtly discriminate. For example, when a man and woman walk into a business

meeting, the assumption that the man is the more senior or that the woman is the secretary.

**Why does greater diversity matter in the workplace?**

Diverse teams boost creativity and innovation.

Research showed that diverse teams are better at making decisions 87% of the time over non-diverse teams. Diverse teams offer broader perspectives and bring more information to the table.

Supporting workplace diversity helps attract and retain talent. As those born after 1980 grow in percentage and influence in the workplace,

attitudes are shifting. From Deloitte's Global 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: "Over six in 10 Gen Zs (61%) and half of millennials (49%) have experienced harassment or microaggressions at work in the past 12 months."

**How do we address unconscious bias in the workplace?**

Become more aware of our own bias, you can take implicit bias tests online [www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html)

- Be mindful and practice self-awareness
- Make considered decisions

- Widen your social circle
- Set ground rules for behaviour
- Avoid making assumptions
- Use rotas to avoid stereotyping
- Speak out if you notice bias
- Apologise if you get it wrong

**If you would like to uncover more info about this issue, sign up for Jackie's Unconscious Bias session at Cutler's Hall on September 6th. More info here: [www.equalityinstem.org.uk/events/overcoming-unconsciousbias-in-the-workplace](http://www.equalityinstem.org.uk/events/overcoming-unconsciousbias-in-the-workplace)**