

Checklist for Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias and assumptions

Unconscious bias refers to automatic assumptions and attitudes that affect our thinking and decision-making without us noticing. They are based on previous experiences, the environment and stereotypes, and may lead to unfair assessments, for example, in working life or recruitment.

This Checklist for Unconscious Bias presents the most common types of unconscious bias that may affect recruitment. It is a good idea to strive to actively dismantle the impact of these biases on our actions.

Impact on recruitment

Unconscious bias can affect recruitment by unconsciously steering our decision-making and thus leading to unequal choices. For example, a recruiter may unconsciously favour applicants who resemble themselves (so-called affinity bias) or applicants to whom they connect positive stereotypes.

In addition, the recruiter may unconsciously underestimate applicants to whom they connect negative stereotypes. This may be reflected in assumptions related to the applicant's abilities or suitability that are based on their name, gender, age, or background. As a result, the organisation may lose diversity at different stages of the recruitment process and miss out on competent people.

Go through this checklist in each one of the next stages of the recruitment process

1. When preparing a job advertisement.
2. Before reviewing applications.
3. When making decisions on who to invite for interviews.
4. When preparing to interview applicants.
5. Before requesting and assessing possible work samples, such as portfolios or showreels.
6. Before making final decisions on recruitment.

Note that this is a list of the most common unconscious biases and assumptions and that there may be overlaps between them.

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Affinity bias

Affinity bias refers to the recruiter's tendency to subconsciously favour individuals with whom they share similar characteristics, background, or interests.

First impression bias

The recruiter can draw conclusions on the applicants based on their appearance, name, voice or background even before the interview. This may lead to favouritism or rejection without assessing the applicant's actual competence.

Halo effect

In the halo effect, a positive impression of a person impacts the assessment of that person as a whole, which means that the recruiter may end up examining the person's other abilities and characteristics through a more positive lens, too.

Horns effect

The horns effect is the opposite of the halo effect: it means that the overall assessment of a person is made based on one characteristic or a presumed characteristic that is considered negative. This can lead to a pointedly negative impression of the person's character or abilities in the recruitment process.

Perception bias

Stereotypes associated with specific groups can affect how an applicant's qualifications and potential are assessed. For example, assumptions related to gender, age, ethnicity, or other background factors may have a negative impact on recruitment decisions (see [example](#)).

Prove it again bias

Prove it again bias refers to the tendency to require persons belonging to underrepresented groups to prove their competence repeatedly or to assess their competence more strictly and demandingly than in the case of representatives of other groups.

Attribution bias

Attribution bias refers to the tendency to explain events or people's behaviour based on stereotypes instead of assessing the situation objectively in the recruitment process. For example, being late would be seen as a characteristic stemming from the applicant's culture.

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Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias refers to the tendency in the recruitment process to favour information that supports our already adopted beliefs. It makes us search for, interpret, and remember information in a way that strengthens our own perspective, but at the same time it can prevent us from assessing the situation impartially or openly.

Overconfidence bias

Overconfidence bias refers to a tendency to think that one's own abilities, knowledge or decisions are better than they actually are. It can cause us to overestimate our competence and knowledge, which can lead to errors, for example, when assessing situations or making decisions. This bias can affect both the applicant and the recruiter.

Maternal wall bias

Maternal wall bias refers to prejudices and assumptions directed at mothers or applicants who become mothers. This may lead to the underestimation of their commitment, competence or ability to perform their duties, which may subconsciously have a negative impact on recruitment decisions or career prospects.

Anchoring bias

Anchoring bias refers to the tendency to rely too much on the first information we receive ("anchor") and to use it as a benchmark in our subsequent evaluations in the recruitment process. In recruitment, anchoring bias may result in the recruiter making decisions based on the information or impressions they receive first, such as the applicant's first interview or CV.

More information

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