

# Summit

***UNCONSCIOUS BIAS***

***TRAINING***

# ***UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING***

Unconscious Bias training has many organisations stumped. In a world where bias and discrimination against others based on factors such as sex, race, or gender identity is making an everyday appearance in the news, HR departments are eager to ensure their employer is not at the centre of the next scandal. So they turn to Unconscious Bias training, which they see as a 'quick fix' to eliminate biases from their workforce and protect both employees' wellbeing and the organisation's reputation.

Unfortunately, this is not how it works. Too often, well-intentioned training courses fail to deliver any meaningful change, leaving many to wonder if Unconscious Bias training is worth it at all. But the question should not be whether or not to have Unconscious Bias training, but how to ensure that training creates immediate and lasting value.

## ***WHY UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING FAILS***

Not all Unconscious Bias training is created equal. In a recent meta-analysis of almost 500 studies on the effectiveness of Unconscious Bias training, psychologist Patrick Forscher and colleagues found that the training was unsuccessful in changing biased behaviour. Writing in Harvard Business Review, Francesca Gino and Katherine Coffman stated that other studies have seen training actually backfire, the message that biases are involuntary leaving participants with the feeling that such biases are acceptable and do not need to be changed.

If Unconscious Bias training is to be effective then, it must move beyond creating awareness of biases, their impacts, and their sources, and provide practical ways for participants to manage their biases and mitigate their effects in a variety of workplace situations.

Unfortunately, most HR departments are not equipped to differentiate between the training courses that will create value and those that will just drain resources. When Unconscious Bias training is seen as a box-ticking exercise to satisfy stakeholders and avoid the wrath of regulators, unions, and the government if things go wrong, there's little motivation to ensure the content of the training is right for your organisation. Instead, training should be considered an organisational imperative like Health and Safety – with the primary aim being to protect the organisation and its staff.

## ***THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VALUABLE AND POINTLESS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING***

Firstly, and most importantly, a valuable Unconscious Bias training course is more than just raising awareness. Understanding what biases are, how they arise, and how they can impact others is a crucial part of any training, but it is just the start. For a course to initiate real change amongst participants it must provide them with a toolkit of proven tools and techniques to recognise and challenge their own biases, alongside the knowledge of how to adapt workplace processes to mitigate the impact of staff biases.

It is also vital that the content of any training is relevant to the participants. Theory is unlikely to be absorbed when presented only in general terms, without thought to the specific workplace situations participants may find themselves in. Valuable training relates Unconscious Bias to key organisational activities and procedures that affect participants, such as recruitment, team dynamics, or bullying and harassment policy. If the content feels relevant to the participants, they can connect to the messages and key learning points, and are more motivated to put their learning into practice. A valuable course will be engaging and involving for participants – not a two-hour long speech accompanied by a wordy PowerPoint presentation.

Whichever course is chosen, it is important that it is effectively communicated to participants before the training starts *why* they have been asked to attend and what the benefits are for the organisation and employees. When a course is presented as a task to be completed, participants are not motivated to do any more than passively attend, and this is what happens when poor communication leads attendees to think: *'Why am I here? This has nothing to do with me.'*

## ***HOW TO EMBED LEARNING ONCE THE TRAINING IS COMPLETE***

Any lasting return on investment is only generated from successfully transferring and embedding the new skills, standards, and techniques back in your organisation. As with any other learning, if the training is seen as a one-off task, the chances of it being applied in the workplace after the course is over are pretty slim. On the other hand, when it is seen as an essential activity that will benefit the organisation, employees, stakeholders, and customers, this creates a commitment to transfer and embed the learning in the workplace long term.

Retaining competency doesn't need repeated learning through refresher courses, but it does require putting in the effort to change automatic thoughts, behaviours, and workplace practices to ensure the learning becomes embedded in the culture and the day-to-day behaviour of employees.

Here are a few tips on how to help employees apply their learning upon returning to their regular work:

- Follow up the training with an email to participants. Here you can thank them for their attendance and engagement, but also be sure to invite feedback on the course and offer support to aid them in using their new skills in the workplace.
- Have each participant meet with their line manager for a debrief meeting in the first few days after the training. Here they can share their learning, discuss their response to the training, and agree their next steps for putting their learning into practice.
- Organise a meet up for participants a few weeks after the training to collaboratively review progress, discuss challenges, and find solutions.

- Create a buddy system where each participant is matched with one other with whom they agree to meet once a week for 30 minutes. In these informal meetings they can provide each other with practical support and guidance on how to manage workplace challenges with the knowledge and skills they developed in the training.
- Include the training's key learning points and personal development goals in participant's formal performance management. This makes it clear that the organisation and its managers consider the training valuable and as important to an employee's performance and development as any other area of their work.

Unconscious Bias training can be a waste of your organisation's resources and your employee's precious time. It can also be a highly valuable investment that protects staff from prejudice, creates a healthier and more productive workplace, and protects the organisation as a whole from the reputational damage of a discrimination scandal. The difference begins with understanding what value a training course can bring and how you can ensure those goals are achieved – in both the short and long term. If you would like to find out more about how practical, engaging Unconscious Bias training can help your organisation, please get in touch with one of our expert facilitators.

# Summit

Contact us on:



[www.SummitTraining.co.uk](http://www.SummitTraining.co.uk)



[Info@SummitTraining.co.uk](mailto:Info@SummitTraining.co.uk)



0845 052 3701 (UK)