



 **RGF Staffing**

# Unveiling Unconscious Bias

Steps to ensure unconscious bias  
doesn't get in the way of hiring

# What is Unconscious Bias?

Bias is an unbalanced opinion in preference of, or opposed to, a thing, idea, or person. Bias is often learned but can arguably be instinctive. It typically is narrow-minded, prejudicial, or unjust.

Anyone can have biases.

Unconscious bias is bias that people often don't realise they have.

Although it is not as obvious as explicit bias, such biases still quietly reinforce discrimination and unfair judgements against a person or peoples in comparison to another person or peoples. Usually resulting in harm or penalisation for the 'judged' group and benefits for those who are not part of the bias.

We all have unconscious bias and must be aware of that – in fact, this is part of the solution. When we take action to remove the word 'unconscious' from bias, we can better understand our personal bias, why we have it, and what we can do to avoid acting on it. Realising bias is the first step in ensuring we do not let it affect our decision making and behaviour.

You can gain a better understanding of your own biases by taking a quiz like this: [www.diversityaustralia.com.au/test-your-own-unconscious-bias](http://www.diversityaustralia.com.au/test-your-own-unconscious-bias)

RGF Staffing APEJ with the help of our Chandler Macleod Consulting business conducted a survey of 326 people to better understand their experiences surrounding diversity and inclusion (D&I) in their workplace. In this report we will look at:

- Why diversity and inclusion is beneficial and pertinent in any workplace
- What the risks are when diversity and inclusion is not managed well
- How to overcome bias and be consciously inclusive from hiring fairly to maintaining an inclusive work culture





# What are the benefits of an inclusive workplace and removing bias from the equation?

First things first, it is vital to almost all surveyed that their organisation was diverse (84.7%) and inclusive (86.2%). What matters to employees must matter to employers and be taken into account to build a sustainable and engaging work culture.

Additionally,

- Employees who are comfortable will be happier and more productive
- A diverse and inclusive culture can improve employee engagement, retention, and trust
- Diversity of thought is beneficial for business growth and inclusive culture
- A broader range of skillsets will be brought to the job
- Decision making and innovation can be improved
- Cultural awareness for internal and external stakeholders will be higher

It feels strange to even be writing about why diversity and inclusion is important. It seems obvious that workplaces should make D&I a priority to ensure all people at work are comfortable, safe, and free to be themselves regardless of their race, gender, age, physical and mental ability, religion, or sexual orientation.

To many, D&I is an ethical necessity for all working industries, since much of our country is diverse, so should be our workplaces. At RGF Staffing APEJ, we have a goal to build a company that evenly represents and reflects the community in which we work. One example being that over 3% of the temporary staff Chandler Macleod has placed at client sites, out of approximately 20,000 workers, have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. This is close to the percentage of Indigenous people in the entire Australian population, which is 3.3% (according to Australia's census in 2016). These equivalents are attempted internally within our organisation for all diverse communities, as well as in our hiring efforts for our clients.

Further, it has been made even more clear with the rise of remote and hybrid working that keeping employees engaged means businesses must consistently and genuinely care about their employees.

However, one third of the survey respondents believed that they have experienced discrimination or have missed opportunities in their careers due to their underrepresented backgrounds, with an additional 20% of respondents who slightly believed so.

Therefore, it is valuable to explore the importance of diversity and inclusion in employee experience, as well as how it can benefit businesses.



## What are the risks of not managing diversity and inclusion well?

When diversity and inclusion is not managed well, there can be undesirable impacts on multiple levels.

### On the Individual Level

Employees tend to be less engaged and committed. They are less likely to trust their employers, which can in turn impact their job satisfaction and productivity, and may eventually increase their intention to leave.

### On the Team Level

Cohesion and dynamic might be impacted. As such, team members may feel unsafe to openly express their feelings for fear of judgement. Additionally, polarised or biased group decisions can be made since team members may withhold their opinions to avoid conflict, which can in turn affect team productivity and performance.

### On the Organisational Level

The unconscious bias is likely to become even less noticeable, when most employees are from similar backgrounds, or when a certain position comprises people with similar demographic characteristics. As a result, talent attraction and retention might be affected given employees from underrepresented backgrounds may feel unwelcomed. Innovation and development can also be impaired, given the like-mindedness of employees and lack of variety in skillsets.

# Ensuring long-lasting conscious diversity and inclusion

While it's helpful to understand the benefits of D&I and the risks of not doing it well, what matters more is what organisations can do to better to manage unconscious bias and enable long-lasting conscious inclusion. Below are some practical recommendations retrieved from the conducted survey:

- People of diverse backgrounds should socialise or spend casual time informal time at work together
- Include workplace training specific to workplace diversity and inclusion
- Celebrate cultural events such as International Women's Day or Wear It Purple Day publicly
- Leaders and managers need to:
  - encourage employees to try something new without fearing mistakes or failure
  - encourage information sharing
  - encourage everyone to openly express their feelings

Amongst all the organisational processes and systems, hiring is where individuals have their first impression of an organisation's D&I and plays an important role in building a diverse and inclusive work culture.

Only around half of the respondents (52%) felt that the hiring decisions of their employers were objective and didn't appear to be influenced by age, gender, race, class, disability or sexuality, which indicates great opportunities for improvement.

Here are some possible approaches to managing unconscious bias in hiring decisions:

## Blind application and screening processes

This can look like resumes without significant identifying information.

*"By hiding certain characteristics like age, gender, ethnicity, or level of education, you can remove the different cognitive biases that creep up when reading a resume"<sup>1</sup>*

## Unconscious Bias Assessments as part of the onboarding process

This can ensure all your employees have a self-awareness of unconscious bias and how it may affect their judgement from the very beginning of their journey with you. By introducing this from the onboarding process you can build an equitable culture from the ground up.

## Diversity Goals

Many companies have now implemented diversity goals, measured against the statistics of the community in which they are part of. This is a good way to not only build a diverse environment but to also create accountability within your business to create equity.

<sup>1</sup> [www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/blind-hiring-process](http://www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/blind-hiring-process)

## Hiring Managers need to address their own bias:

### **Be aware and accept that you have biases**

The first step is being aware to know which biases are unhelpful or harmful. To deny having bias stops your journey to better hiring decisions from the beginning.

### **Spend time reading and learning about the experience of underrepresented communities at work**

This is an important step to developing understanding and empathy so that you are better equipped to deal with different people's experiences.

### **Explicitly call out where bias could show up and when it occurs**

It is vital to recognise where bias may have previously affected business decision making, and to make sure people within your business know that it is unacceptable when bias occurs (especially explicit bias). Sometimes a longer, more delicate discussion may need to be had around unconscious biases.

### **Reduce the influence of other people's opinions on your decisions**

In a managerial position, having others' input is important, especially when hiring for a cohesive team. However, ultimately, the responsibility needs to be mostly yours, especially for hiring decisions.

### **Understand how reducing bias can personally benefit you**

Reducing bias can be of personal benefit to you too. Learning about this will help you be more willing and open to doing the work required to avoid leaving your biases going unchecked.

### **Apply the "flip it to test" approach**

This means to ask if you were to swap out the candidate from an underrepresented background with one of your more typical hires, would you have the same decision?



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