

Unconscious bias

How a person thinks can depend on their life experiences. Sometimes they have beliefs and views about other people that might not be right or reasonable.

This is known as 'unconscious bias' and includes when a person thinks:

- better of someone because they believe they're alike
- less of someone because that person is different to them, for example, they might be of a different race, religion or age

This means they could make a decision influenced by false beliefs or assumptions.

Everyone can think in a way that involves unconscious bias at some point. It's important to be aware that bias could be affecting behaviour or decisions.

Apart from [in very limited circumstances allowed in law](#), employers and employees must not make decisions about job applicants or staff based on a protected characteristic. Doing so could lead to a discrimination claim to an employment tribunal.

Example of unconscious bias

A manager ignores an idea from a woman. The manager later accepts the same idea from a man. The manager does not realise they've done this until other people in the team point it out.

Ways to avoid unconscious bias

Ways to avoid unconscious bias at work include:

- being aware that everyone can be affected by unconscious bias without realising it
- advertising a job vacancy in at least 2 different places to reach a wide range of people from different backgrounds
- getting recruiting managers to tell each other if they notice any signs of being biased
- holding back some details on job application forms, such as the applicant's name or sex (this is called 'blind sifting'), that could affect recruiting managers' opinions
- at each stage, having more than one person sifting job applications, interviewing the applicants and deciding who gets the job
- allowing time to make decisions, for example on recruitment, promotions or grievance and disciplinary outcomes
- keeping a written record of why decisions were made

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