

# Implicit Bias

Re: Perception Institute <https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/>

**Implicit bias** is the condition of having attitudes towards people or associating stereotypes with them without being consciously aware of doing so.

A common example of implicit bias is favouring or being more receptive to familiar-sounding names than those from other cultural groups. Implicit bias doesn't mean that inclusivity is not one of our values. It means that we are not aware of how our own implicit bias can impact our actions and decisions.

**Implicit biases** are social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Implicit bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values. Certain scenarios can activate unconscious attitudes and beliefs. For example, biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure.

## What can be done about it? What can you do?

The most important first step is to be honest with yourself and acknowledge that despite your values and intentions, you also have implicit biases.

Only by accepting our biases, can we mitigate against them. It can be really useful to have conversations with others about our biases and explore where these biases might have stemmed from.

It is also helpful to slow down and not make decisions in a hurry. Can you justify the decision? Does the data substantiate your decision? Making decisions as a team can help to mitigate implicit biases.

**Implicit bias is a universal phenomenon, not limited by race, gender, or even country of origin.**



# Cognitive Bias

Re: *The Lowdown* - <https://ww2.kqed.org/lowdown/2017/05/09/confirmation-bias/>

Human brains are hardwired to take shortcuts when processing information to make decisions. This can result in systemic thinking errors that lead to unconscious bias. It is the key reason that hard facts and evidence are sometimes not convincing enough to change our minds about certain deeply held positions and beliefs.

## Five common types of cognitive bias:

1. **Anchoring bias** - Relying too heavily on the first piece of information you come across
2. **Blind-spot bias** - Recognizing bias in others, but failing to recognize it in yourself
3. **Negativity bias** - Focusing on negative events at the expense of positive or neutral events
4. **Confirmation bias** - Listening to and trusting only information that confirms your beliefs.
5. **Outcome bias** - Making a decision based on the outcome of a previous event without any regard to other factors involved

## How do we perpetuate bias?

Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the culture at large. The fact that White culture is dominant in North America may explain why racialized people often do not show a strong bias favoring their own ethnic group.

Mass media routinely takes advantage of stereotypes as shorthand to paint a



mood, scene or character. The elderly, for example, are routinely portrayed as being frail and forgetful, while younger people are often shown as vibrant and able.

Stereotypes can also be conveyed by omission in popular culture, as when TV shows present an all-white world. Psychologists theorize bias conveyed by the media helps to explain why children can adopt hidden prejudices even when their family environments explicitly oppose them.

## The Organizational Unconscious

*Adapted from: <http://www.cookcross.com/docs/UnconsciousBias.pdf>*

Unconscious behavior is not just individual; it influences organizational culture as well. This explains why so often our best attempts at creating change, especially regarding widening the scope of membership engagement, seem to fall frustratingly short; to not deliver on the promise they intended.

**Organizational culture** is more or less an enduring collection of basic assumptions and ways of interpreting things that a given organization has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its internal and external influences. **Unconscious organizational patterns**, or “norms” of behavior, exert an enormous influence over organizational decisions, choices, and behaviors. These deep-seated characteristics are often the reason that our efforts to change organizational behavior fail. Despite our best conscious efforts, the “organizational unconscious” perpetuates the status quo and keeps old patterns, values, and behavioral norms firmly rooted.

**One example** of the conflict between our conscious choices and the “organizational unconscious” in the union movement, is sustainable activism – a conscious decision of activists to balance work, family, leisure, and activism. This includes bringing self-care and self-love, into the activist equation. This is something we openly support as an organization. We read about it, we talk about it and it is part of the education we give to activists. Despite all of that, when activists actually take firm action to implement a strategy for sustainable activism, they are often viewed by others, including members (active or not), peers and union leaders, as “less committed,” “less valuable,” or “unreliable” as a union



leader. Officially, we say that sustainable activism is key to building our movement, but in actuality a conflict exists.

While the organization consciously acknowledges that approaching activism in a holistic and sustainable way is the “right” thing to do and may even help increase retention and activist satisfaction, the organizational unconscious believes differently. **Unconsciously, the organization’s culture of burn-out activism pervades:** the notion that constant stress, long hours, huge sacrifice and absolute dedication to the cause - above all else, is what makes a “good” activist - one fit for leadership, is still prevalent. This has a profound impact on who gets s/elected to leadership positions in our organization and who doesn’t.

Conflicts such as this can leave activists and potential activists frustrated by the feeling that their leaders are disingenuous in their statements, when in actuality the leaders may not see the conflict themselves. This is just one example of how our **organizational bias can deter engagement of our members.**

Therefore, we should not rely on any sense of subjective determinations of attitude, either individually or collectively, to determine whether our organization is functioning in inclusive ways. **Our conscious attitudes may have little to do with our success in producing results.** We have to create **objective measurements** that give us individual and collective feedback on our performance if we are to continue to build a movement that is relevant, vibrant, and truly inclusive.

