

INSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT IMPLICIT BIAS FROM UNDERMINING ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY

Written by Victoria W. Jackson | Formatted by Preshuslee Thompson

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Recognizing the value of diverse experiences and perspectives, many organizations seek effective ways to increase racial and ethnic diversity and expand opportunities for people of color. The growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion across sectors has created the need for practical and meaningful solutions to increase the representation of racial and ethnic minorities; however, two significant challenges exist to achieving these aims.

Numerous barriers to improved diversity and opportunity are rooted in Structural Inequalities and Implicit Bias that are byproducts of past and present policies and practices.

Given these challenges, to produce the desired team of employees and leaders, organizations should acknowledge how structural inequality can affect applicant pools while also actively mitigating the influence of implicit bias.



To learn more about implicit bias check out our Review!

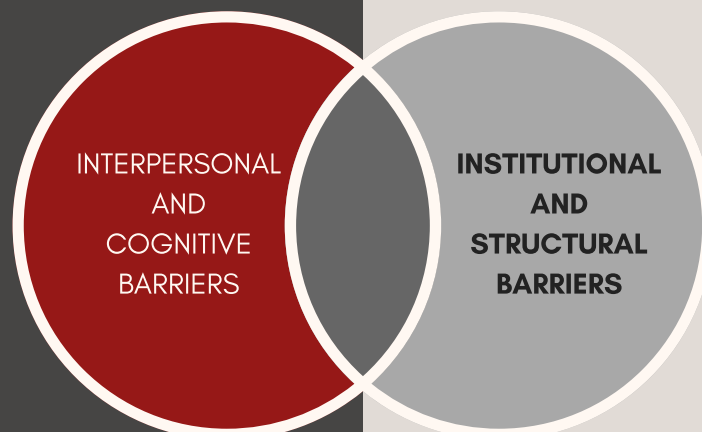
UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES

Before the hiring process even begins, the pool of potential applicants is shaped by structural inequalities at all levels of society. Structural racialization refers to how historical and contemporary policies and practices can interact to create and perpetuate social, economic, political arrangements that limit opportunity for people of color.

All aspects of life are affected by structural racialization: education, housing, healthcare, transportation, employment, and criminal justice, among others. Together, these factors can conspire to limit the employment opportunities available to people of color

For example, people of color are more likely to live in areas with significant barriers to opportunity like poor performing PreK-12 education, which can leave individuals less prepared to pursue post-secondary education.

Thus, when implementing a plan to increase racial and ethnic diversity, hiring professionals should be mindful of how the complex dynamics of structural racialization can shape the applicant pool.



UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT BIAS

Implicit Bias is the unconscious attitudes and stereotypes we hold about different groups of people that influence our actions.

Operating outside of conscious awareness, the implicit associations we form through a lifetime of direct and indirect messages about groups of people can cause us to have unconscious attitudes about people based on characteristics like race, ethnicity, and gender. Whether we realize it or not, these associations, positive or negative, can influence our behavior and decisions.

Research suggests that we are most susceptible to implicit biases under certain conditions, such as those listed in Figure 1. All of which are common conditions of hiring procedures. Because the hiring process can be quite stressful and often requires quickly processing significant amounts information, this creates environment conducive to implicitly biased thinking and decision-making.



Figure 1.

Implicit Bias in Hiring

Bertrand and Mullainathan tested the interview callback rates for resumes belonging to stereotypically White and Black names. They found a statistically significant 50% callback discrepancy between White applicants and Black applicants, meaning that White applicants must send about 10 resumes to receive one callback, whereas Black applicants must send 15 resumes to receive one callback.



Defining "Fit"

The notion of whether a job candidate "fits" in an organization or position can introduce implicit bias. Given its inherent subjectivity, fit is often based on personal preferences rather than objective job qualifications. Because fit can be defined differently by everyone, this ambiguous concept can allow for individuals' implicit biases to affect hiring decisions.

Nevertheless, hiring based on fit is a common practice. To illustrate, a 2012 study on elite employers found that "Evaluators described fit as being one of the most important criteria they used to assess candidates in job interviews" [2].

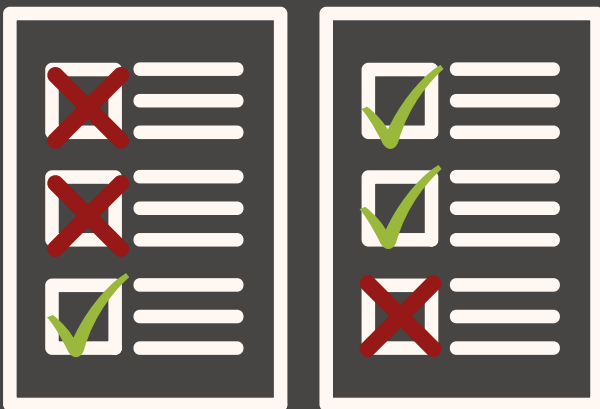
Unfortunately, determining who fits is often a function of ingroup bias wherein people who are 'one of us' (i.e., our ingroup) are favored over those who differ from ourselves (i.e., our outgroup) [3]. To illustrate this point, consider a hiring manager deciding between three qualified candidates for a position. When making the final hiring decision, the hiring manager may unconsciously favor and ultimately select the candidate who reminds her of herself as a young professional and has a cultural background similar to most employees of the organization.

[Click to Check out the Study!](#)

Suggestions

Evaluating Work Quality

Dr. Arin N Reeves of Nextion analyzed the editing and response to mistakes in both Black and White lawyer writing. Evidence showed that the writing from the Black lawyer was more harshly critiqued and mistakes were more often found than in the White lawyer's writing*. This supported Reeves' hypothesis that, when presented with information (such as race) that affirmed one's implicit bias about an individual, the reader was influenced to critique more ardently that individual's work.



*Identical writing samples were presented to editors, only race was changed.

Learning about the effects of implicit bias can lead some toward the notion that a blind review process for hiring is the best option to minimize bias. While this inclination is understandable, a blind review is not the best option because this approach fails to account for the structural pipeline issues discussed earlier. Because blind reviews disguise structural dynamics, the candidates that emerge are likely to have had the greatest access to opportunity, not necessarily those who would make the best employees.

Fortunately, there are several other institutional methods for proactively mitigating the harmful effects of implicit bias on hiring. To illustrate these action steps, the hiring process evaluation checklist below depicts key stages of the hiring process and provides institutional-level interventions to reduce implicit bias in hiring and achieve diversity goals.

1. Broaden Recruitment Networks

2. Use accessible and inclusive job posting descriptions

3. Train all staff on implicit bias & take steps to reduce chances of implicit bias occurring

4. Define "fit" by the special attributes your company desires

5. Standardize interview process & use standardized evaluation forms