

Mitigating bias

Building a better workplace

We all carry bias, uniquely shaped by our own lived experience. Recognising these biases and mitigating their impact is essential for building fair and inclusive workplaces. Bias can influence every stage of the employee journey—from recruitment and onboarding to development and promotion. It can show up in individual behaviours, as well as in the systems, policies, and practices that guide how we work.

In STEM organisations, bias can contribute to barriers that affect attraction, progression, retention and recognition. Left unchecked, it can limit opportunities for talented individuals and prevent organisations from accessing the full range of skills and perspectives needed to innovate and succeed.

What is bias?

Bias is an inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair. It is a natural cognitive process that helps the brain make quick judgments, but these shortcuts can contribute to inaccurate or discriminatory decisions.

For example, name bias is the tendency to make assumptions based on a person's name. Research shows that names can influence recruitment decisions, with candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds often less likely to receive a positive response from employers despite having equivalent qualifications and experience.

inclination lived experience patterns
stereotypes preference cultural
unique **bias** social influence
automatic assumption unconscious personal experience

Bias can take many forms, but it is often grouped into two broad categories: **implicit bias** and **explicit bias**.

Implicit bias is an automatic, unconscious assumption that develops through learned behaviour, personal experiences, and wider social and cultural influences. For example, assuming a woman lacks the technical expertise to lead a project and automatically assigning the task to a man despite both having similar qualifications and experience. This can perpetuate stereotypes and create a less inclusive workplace culture.

This can perpetuate stereotypes and create a non-inclusive workplace culture.

Explicit bias, on the other hand, is intentional and openly expressed. It includes attitudes or beliefs that a person is aware of, even if they are unfair or discriminatory. For example, openly stating a preference for hiring individuals from a certain background over others. This can create hostile and stressful work environments where employees are uncomfortable expressing differing opinions or undervalued.

Why is acknowledging and mitigating bias important?

Bias, implicit or explicit, shapes the way we perceive, interpret and interact with others in our personal lives, workplaces and wider society. More importantly, bias can influence the decisions we make and the opportunities available to those around us.

Specifically in a workplace setting, mitigating bias helps to create a fairer and more inclusive environment where people can thrive, learn and be afforded opportunities through a culture of trust and psychological safety.

Bias is not always negative. Sometimes we favour individuals because they share characteristics, interests or experiences with us, or because we have formed a particularly positive impression of them. While often unintentional, this can still influence decisions and create unequal access to opportunities for others.

For example, the Halo Effect can lead us to overestimate someone's abilities based on a single positive trait or achievement. Over time, this may result in them receiving more visibility, support or opportunities than equally capable colleagues.



How to mitigate bias to create an inclusive workplace



Understand the biases you might hold

Self reflection helps us identify how personal experiences or preferences may be influencing our decisions.

For example, during recruitment you may have a candidate who has a similar educational background to you. It's important to ask yourself if they are the best person for the role, or if you're being influenced by similarities you might share.

This may not always feel comfortable but it's important to remember that everyone holds bias.

Turn awareness into action

Actively challenge stereotypes and question how bias may be shaping decisions.

Diverse perspectives play a critical role in mitigating bias. If you involve people with different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, it becomes more natural to recognise your own bias or to challenge those of others.

Where challenging bias feels uncomfortable, involving an impartial person in decision processes (e.g., interview panels, promotion discussions, or awards processes) can help ensure fairness.



Organisational awareness and support

While personal awareness is important, organisations also have a responsibility to design fair and inclusive systems.

Structured recruitment processes, transparent promotion criteria, diverse decision-making panels and regular reviews of workplace data can all help reduce the impact of bias.

Equip your leaders with the necessary skills

Mitigating bias training can help increase awareness of bias and provide practical tools for making more objective, inclusive decisions. Supporting employees with training helps all stages of the employee lifecycle, including hiring, performance reviews and promotion pathways.

Training in mitigating bias better equips organisations to create more consistent, objective decision-making and supports a culture of inclusion.



Want to know more? Work with WISE!

Mitigating bias is not about achieving perfection or eliminating every unconscious assumption. It is about recognising where bias exists, understanding its impact, and taking practical steps to ensure people are assessed fairly and given equal opportunities to succeed.

We offer training which focuses on how to overcome biases to create more inclusive and supportive work environments for women. It covers three key areas:

- Awareness
- Impact and consequences
- Tools for action

Find out more about in-company training [here](#).

All in-company training is tailored to your people, priorities and context, equipping your teams with the knowledge, confidence and practical tools to create more inclusive workplaces and drive meaningful change.

If you're interested in allyship training, or any other WISE products and services, please contact SineadBarry@theiet.org.



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