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Implicit Bias in the Workplace

A Primer for Businesses Looking to Elevate their Knowledge of Diversity and Inclusion Best Practices

Implicit Bias in the Workplace

Implicit bias is a type of discrimination that exists within the workplace as a result of a culture within broader society.

Unlike explicit bias, implicit bias causes people to make decisions based on stereotypes or prejudices without consciously doing so.

Implicit bias persists, despite legislation against outright discrimination, on the basis of harmful stereotypes, hegemonic ideologies, and institutionalized barriers in place that perpetuate systemic oppression.



Implicit Bias and Subsequent Microaggressions

Implicit bias can manifest in a variety of different ways. One such occurrence includes microaggressions.

Kevin Nadal, a professor of psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, describes microaggressions as "the everyday, subtle, intentional — and oftentimes unintentional — interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups."



Microaggressions alienate people within a workplace and a greater society, perpetuating stereotypes that further extend the dichotomy of the "norm" versus the "other."

Acting surprised and proclaiming, "You speak good English," or expressing that you "don't see color," or even subconsciously paying less attention to a female coworker presenting than her male counterpart are all examples of microaggressions.

The Three Tiers of Microaggressions

Verbal

This occurs when someone says something, often meant to be “positive,” that further marginalizes an individual to their assigned group.

ie: “You’re smart for a woman.”

Behavioral

This occurs when someone behaves in a way that is discriminatory.

ie: Hiring bias, wherein someone hires the more “White” sounding names, based on the assumption that they are more capable.

Environmental

This occurs within a larger scope of society and is deeply embedded in the cultural norms.

ie: College campuses having problematic statues of historically racist figures, and buildings names only after White males.



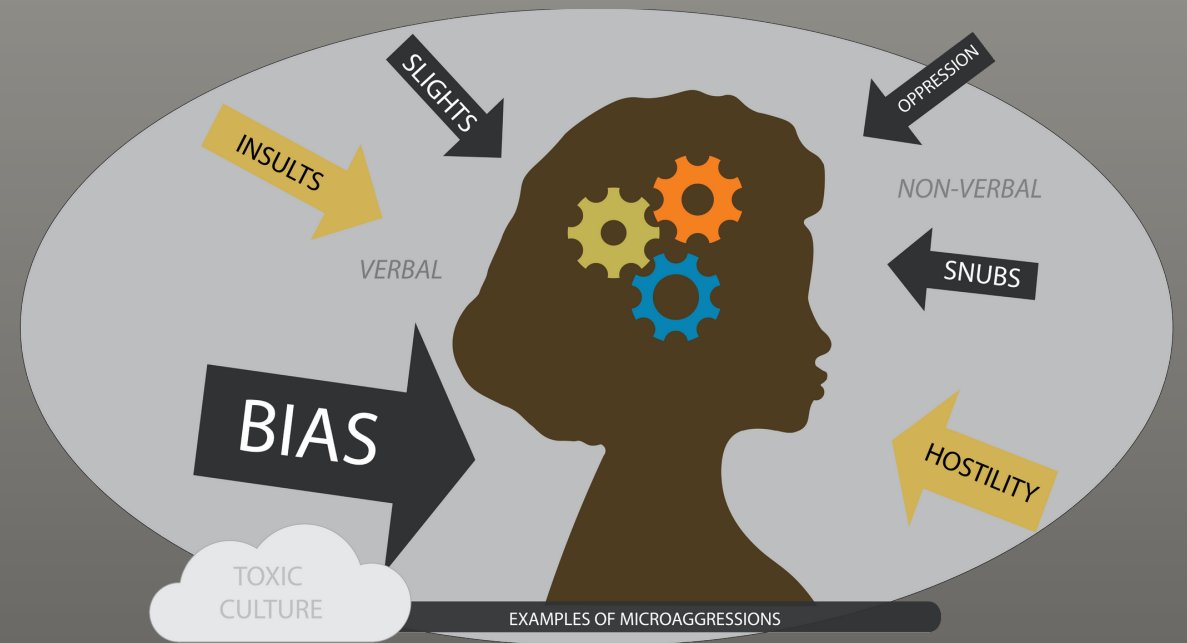
The Development of Implicit Bias

Regardless of how evolved we become, our conscious brain is unable to process the vast amount of information it is constantly exposed to.

Our brain is always seeking to recognize patterns to help expedite the process.

This is why we rely on stereotypes and assumptions to guide our responses.

These stigmas are developed based on historical and cultural context -- which is often build on systemic oppression and marginalization that leads to problematic advantages of select groups of people.



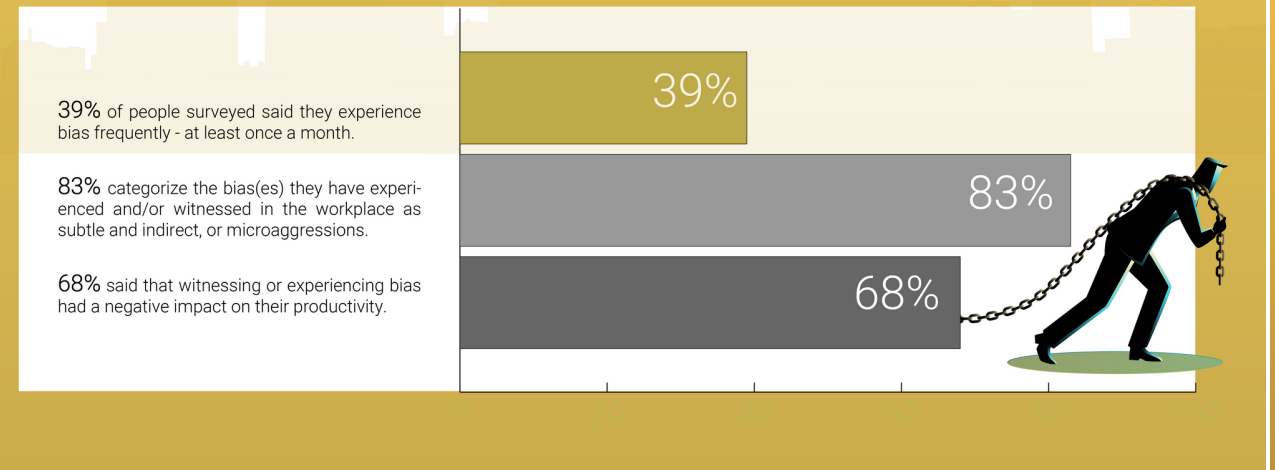
Maintaining Implicit Bias is Counterproductive

Although implicit bias is subconsciously internalized and projected, it does not go without notice.

Implicit bias in the workplace hinders diversity, creativity, and overall productivity. It hurts both the people at the heart of the company (and society as a whole), and the measurable productivity.

For instance, a recent Harvard study unveiled that biased managers negatively impacted the productivity of their minority employees.

Based on a 2019 State of Inclusion Survey:



Multicultural Competency

Multicultural competency can be defined as one's ability to comprehend, appreciate, and interact with those who belong to or identify with cultures/groups outside of your own.

It is essential that one confronts their own implicit biases - however challenging that may be - in order to best adhere to an evolving culture that prioritizes inclusivity, creativity, diversity, and growth.

Every person has their own set of internalized stigmas, and it is only when we acknowledge and purposefully outgrow them that we enable a safe and equitable environment for all.

Multicultural competency is an active framework, and not something that can be accomplished passively.

"Social gains are never handed out. They must be seized." - Sheryl Sandberg,
COO of Facebook



Redefining Leadership

To be a vehicle for change in the plight to disempower implicit bias and enable diversity, you have to start by redefining leadership.

“Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence, and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” - Harvard Business School

You are responsible for the ways in which your actions and behaviors impact those around you.

It is vital that each decision you make takes into account the following:

- Why am I making this decision?
- What are the implications of this action?
- How did I reach this conclusion?
- Who is affected by this choice?

