

WP2: CPD Programme



Self-Directed Learning
Unconscious Bias

Module 2: Unconscious Bias

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Introduction

In this module we will learn about unconscious bias and some related things like stereotypes and prejudice. We will learn about the impact of it on interactions and communication in the workplace. We will discuss how unconscious bias affects HR practices such as recruitment processes and talent management. We will learn what actions can be taken to minimise the undesirable effects of unconscious bias and how SMEs can deal with the emotional impact of a diverse workforce.

After you have read the theoretical part, you can test your understanding of the module topic with a self-assessment quiz. For an even deeper understanding of the topic, there is a case study with reflective questions. To learn more about your own unconscious bias, there are two activities you can do. If you want to dive even deeper into the topic, we offer a link to additional learning resources.

Learning Outcomes of the Module

- Define key terms related to unconscious bias; including stereotypes, heuristics, and affinity bias.
- Understand the effect of unconscious bias on communicative exchange and collaboration between colleagues.
- Identify examples of unconscious bias within HR in the workplace that can be combated through strategies for staying calm and professional during difficult conversations.
- Understand the emotional impact of unconscious bias on individuals and teams, including feelings of exclusion, frustration, and stress.
- Recognise and manage emotions in the workplace and how to implement strategies that promote inclusion and diversity.
- Understand how unconscious bias and emotional impact can manifest in the workplace, and learn how to respond effectively to these situations.

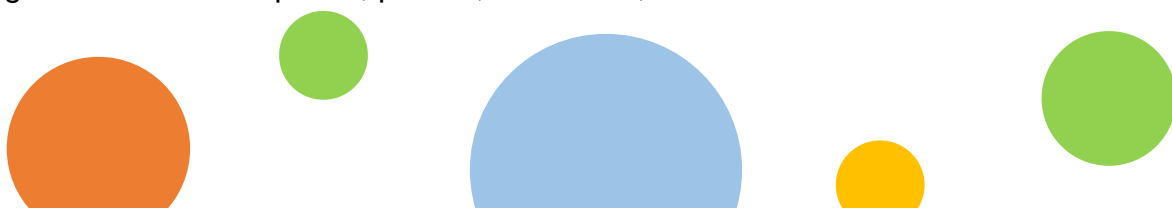
Theoretical Chapter

2.1 Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias refers to the human tendency to form opinions about others based on learned assumptions, beliefs, or attitudes that we are usually not aware of. This is a perfectly normal phenomenon, as our brains like to use small cognitive shortcuts to efficiently navigate the enormous amount of information, we are confronted with all the time. These shortcuts reflect the patterns we have acquired growing up and often reflect stereotypes present in our society and culture.

Stereotypes are general beliefs we have about groups of people that are usually overgeneralised, inaccurate and persistent, even when there is evidence of their errors. They can help us make quick decisions about a group of people, but they are usually wrong when applied to specific people and can lead us to prejudiced attitudes.

Heuristics is an approach to problem solving that uses a practical method that is not guaranteed to be optimal, perfect, or rational, but is nonetheless sufficient to achieve





an immediate, short-term goal or approximation. They are simple strategies that we use to quickly form judgements, make decisions, and find solutions to complex problems. While heuristics can reduce the burden of decision-making and free up limited cognitive resources, it can also be costly if it causes people to overlook critical information or act on unfair biases. It can eventually result in systemic errors.

One form of systemic errors we people often make is prejudice we have against people we don't even know. **Prejudice** against racial or ethnic group is an antipathy accompanied by a faulty generalisation. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group, or toward an individual because he or she is a member of that group.

2.2 Types of unconscious bias

There are different types of unconscious bias, here are some of them:

Confirmation bias is a type of unconscious bias that causes people to pay more attention to information that confirms their existing belief system and disregard that which is contradictory.

Attribution bias causes people to make more favourable assessments of behaviours and circumstances for those in their "in groups" (by giving second chances and the benefit of the doubt) and to judge people in their "out groups" by less favourable group stereotypes.

Availability bias causes people to default to "top of mind" information.

Affinity bias is the tendency to gravitate toward and develop relationships with people who are more like us and share similar interests and backgrounds. This leads people to invest more energy and resources in those who are in their affinity group while unintentionally leaving others out.

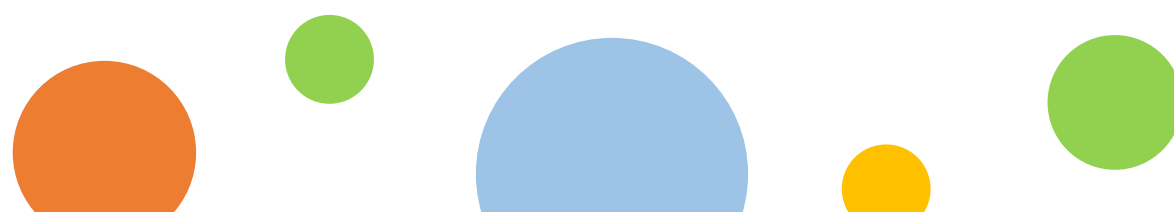
2.3 Unconscious bias in workplace

In diverse workplaces where employees differ in age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, education and national origin, unconscious bias can lead to marginalised groups being treated less favourably. Employees from different ethnic and social backgrounds often feel excluded and not quite "at home" in the office environment. Everyday small situations such as coffee breaks can lead to some employees feeling alienated from the dominant group as coffee "banter", stereotypes and bad-humoured jokes are still prevalent in many office environments.

Failure to build social and emotional bonds with colleagues can lead to early departure from the company. Those who leave often justify it with the lack of networking opportunities and chances for more responsibility. They feel that no one talks about them when there are opportunities for additional responsibility or promotion.

Employees who experience prejudice actively withdraw and reduce their contributions, they feel alienated and withhold their ideas and solutions.

Every time employees feel discriminated against or experience unconscious bias, they experience stress, which can lead to low or no emotional engagement, increased





stress-related illness and increased accidents and absenteeism from work. As a result, employees are unable to do their best work.

For example, many women feel excluded not because of individual examples or situations, but because of a persistent pattern of male behaviour. Whether unintentional or not, male behaviour tends to exclude women from informal networks, reduce or severely limit their opportunities for mentoring and sponsorship, and overlook their ideas and questions in meetings.

LGBT employees often hide their sexual orientation from colleagues and superiors. Whether out of a desire to "fit in" or not "stand out", for many their workplace is a place where they do not feel they can be who they are.

2.4 How to address unconscious bias at work

Even though unconscious bias is normal, and all people are affected by it, this does not mean that it is acceptable and that nothing can be done about it. On the contrary, there are many ways in which we can get a grip on our prejudices and change our behaviour. The brain is flexible and open to improvement. Below are some approaches you can take to reduce the impact of your biases.

1. Become aware of your biases

Take the time to examine your beliefs and assumptions about different social groups of people you encounter in your work. Be honest with yourself. Think about how you react to people from different backgrounds and ask yourself if you have stereotypes about them.

2. Be open to feedback

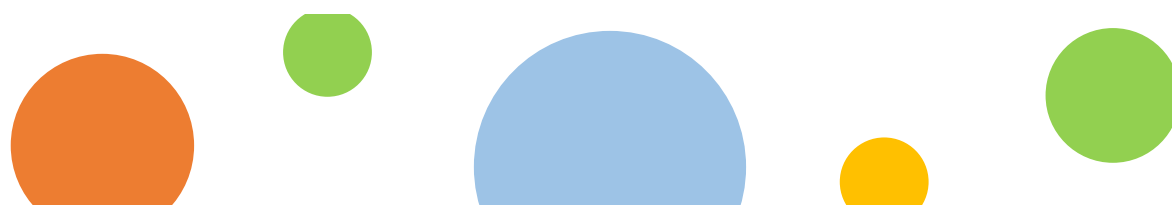
It can help us to know ourselves better if we allow our long-held beliefs and values to be challenged by others. But it can be difficult to learn about ourselves from others. Instead of getting defensive, pay attention to your immediate reaction and try to approach the situation with an open and curious attitude. If you realise that you have behaved unfairly, apologise. This way, others will trust you and listen to you when you point out their bias.

3. Do not rely on your instinct and make considerate decisions

We are most susceptible to unconscious bias when we make quick, unconscious decisions and our 'gut feelings' can often be based on stereotypes. Take time to make decisions and form judgements about people. Try to remain calm and professional in difficult situations.

4. Expand your social circle

The more we know about people who are different from us, the better we can understand them and see a person in them. Take the time to learn about the world from their perspective, in a respectful way. New information will challenge your old assumptions, broaden your expectations of different social groups and make it easier to avoid your unconscious biases.





2.5 Unconscious bias in HR

Unconscious bias often plays an important role in talent management and HR practices. It can have a strong influence in the decision-making process of applicant selection. Recruiters, who often have limited time to review applications, may be unduly influenced by non-qualitative factors such as an applicant's name, photo, or place of residence. The obvious problem is that this way you can overlook candidates who have qualities that are important for the job. As a result of affinity bias, homogeneous work groups are often formed, which research shows are less effective than heterogeneous groups.

On the other hand, unconscious biases can also manifest within diverse work groups, affecting our behaviour towards individuals who are different from us based on factors such as race, gender, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation. Such biases can cause us to behave according to stereotypes, and not according to the real person we interact with. In this way, we fail to take advantage of the benefits that diverse work groups offer and instead create an environment that hinders the expression of the qualities of the individual.

Unconscious bias can also influence decisions regarding project allocation and promotions, potentially causing us to overlook the talents already present within our organisation. This emphasizes the importance of actively managing and mitigating unconscious bias in professional settings to ensure fair and effective decision-making processes.

2.6 How to address unconscious bias in a team

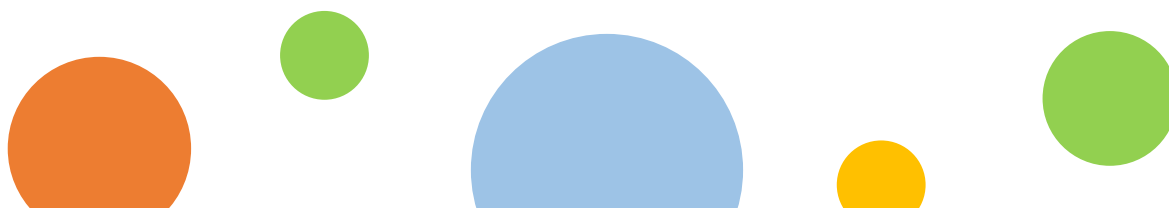
With the following strategies, you can reduce unconscious bias in a team and unlock its full potential:

- find out what types of unconscious bias exist in your team, how strong they are and identify the bias that has the most impact;
- encourage your team to acknowledge the biases and motivate them to challenge them;
- encourage your staff to get to know each other better;
- set ground rules for behaviour, take responsibility and hold others accountable;
- change the way the team works so that everyone has an equal amount of work and a chance to participate (you can use rotation plans for some tasks).

2.7 How to address unconscious bias in hiring process

Below are some measures you can implement in your company to avoid the undesirable effects of unconscious bias during the recruitment process:

- Use structured interviews: Create a standardised set of questions to ask all candidates during the interview so that all candidates are assessed on the same criteria.
- Use blind resume reviews: Remove identifying information such as name, gender, age and educational background from CVs before they are reviewed by the recruiter.





- Increase diversity in the hiring team: Ensure a broad range of perspectives by having applications reviewed by a team that reflects the diversity of applicants.
- Monitor and evaluate hiring practises: This may include analysing data on applicant demographics and hiring outcomes to ensure the process is fair and equitable.

2.8 How to address unconscious bias in talent management

There are also some simple steps in talent management that can help reduce the impact of unconscious bias:

- Establish clear, objective performance measures for evaluating the performance and potential of your employees.
- Provide training and development programmes that give employees the skills and knowledge they need to advance in their careers.
- Be transparent about how decisions about promotions and project assignments are made.
- Ensure that leadership positions are open to a variety of employees so that a range of perspectives and experiences are available at the highest levels of the organisation.
Be willing to challenge your assumptions about what makes a good candidate for promotion.

Self-assessment Quiz:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdoyJ65NsR0BByHXvnui1gL0gY0TEZZvJqmxQF2dn9SOwJ-0A/viewform?usp=sf_link






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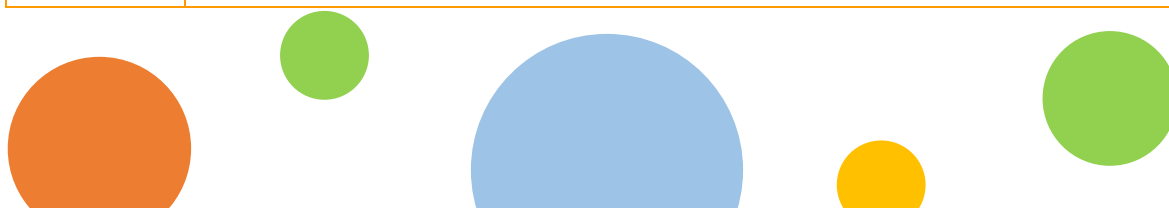
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Case Study

Case Study Title	Overcoming unconscious bias
Image	 <p>Photo by krakenimages on Unsplash</p>
Learning Outcome	Recognise the impact that unconscious bias can have on the overall climate and performance of a work team. Consider what unconscious biases you have towards others and have experienced from others.
Aim of activity	By reading and reflecting on the story in this case study, you will have a better idea of what unconscious bias looks like in the work environment. With the help of the story, you will find it easier to reflect on your unconscious bias and recognise situations where you or someone in your team has been treated unequally.
Introduction	The following case study is a short story about a situation in an SME where the leader of a team treats a member badly because of his unconscious bias against women.
Challenge	John was thrilled to be hired as the new team leader for the marketing department in a small tech startup. He was confident that his years of marketing experience would help him excel in his new role. However, he quickly realized that his team had a diverse makeup that would require some adjustments. Samantha, a hard-working marketer who





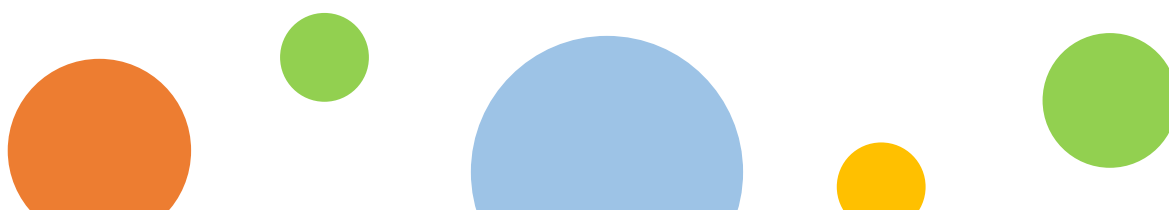
took pride in her work, was one of John's team members. She was excited about the opportunity to work on a new project with John's team.

John thought Samantha was a talented marketer but soon felt frustrated with her work. He noticed that she would often hesitate when giving presentations and wasn't as assertive as the other team members. John started to interrupt Samantha during meetings, ignore her ideas, and criticize her work in public. He thought he was helping her by pushing her out of her comfort zone, but he didn't realize the impact his behaviour was having on her. She soon noticed that John treated her differently from the other team members. Samantha tried to confront John about his behaviour, but he dismissed her concerns and accused her of being too emotional. Samantha felt frustrated and demotivated, and it began to affect her work. As John's behaviour continued, the team started to notice that Samantha wasn't being given a fair chance to contribute. They saw that John was biased towards Samantha and started to question whether he was biased towards them too. The team's morale started to decline, and they became less productive.

It wasn't until Samantha spoke to the CEO about the situation that John realized his behaviour was unconsciously biased. He had never worked with a woman before in a leadership position, and he was struggling to adjust to the dynamics of the team. John felt embarrassed when he learned about the impact his behaviour had on Samantha and the team. He apologized to her and arranged for unconscious bias training for all.

Over time, things improved, John started to see Samantha's talents and strengths, and he became a strong advocate for her ideas and Samantha felt more included in the team. She began to thrive at work. As John's behaviour changed, the team started to notice a positive shift. They saw that John was trying to include everyone in the team's decision-making process, and they felt more valued and respected. The team's morale started to improve, and they became more productive.

In the end, the situation taught everyone about the importance of recognizing and addressing unconscious bias. It was a difficult journey, but it brought the team closer together and helped them create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. They learned that diversity and inclusion were essential for building a successful team where everyone's ideas were valued and respected. They learned that by recognizing and addressing biases, they could build stronger, more cohesive teams that were better equipped to succeed.



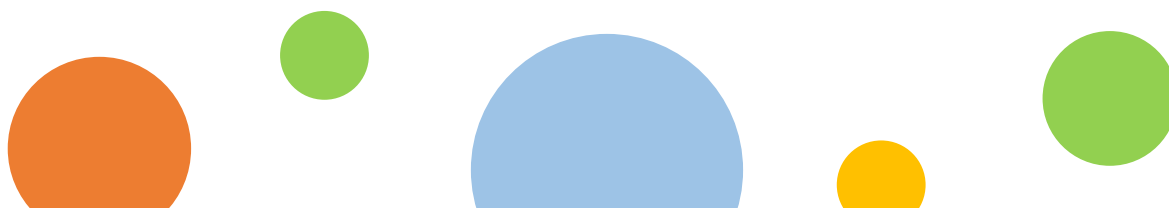


Assignment

After reading the story, take time to think about the following questions. It might help you to write down your answers. Try to be as honest as possible with yourself.

Set of questions for reflection:

1. What are my core beliefs about work environments and co-workers? How can these beliefs limit or empower me and my colleagues at work?
2. How do I respond to people from different backgrounds? Do I have stereotypes or assumptions about a particular social group? Am I aware of them?
3. Do my words and actions reflect my intentions?
4. Can I put myself in a colleague's shoes and empathise with their situation even if I don't relate to it?
5. As a leader, do I recognise and appreciate the differences in my team? Do I feel that I can show where I differ from my team? What would my team say about me?
6. As a team member, do I feel that I can be who I am and show myself? Do I value all colleagues, or do I interact with those who are like me? How do I feel about diversity in my team?





Activity Sheet 1

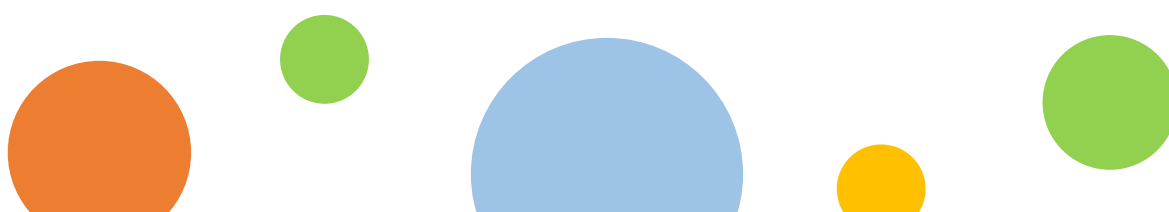
Activity Title	Know your bias
Duration of activity in minutes	30 minutes
Learning Outcome	Through this activity you will learn about your beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices that affect your unconscious bias.
Aim of activity	The aim of this activity is to examine the unconscious beliefs and assumptions you have about a particular group and to develop a greater understanding and empathy for the people in that group. By knowing your bias, you can better avoid acting on it.
Materials Required for Activity	You will need 2 pieces of paper and a pen.
Step-by-step instructions	<p>This is a reflective activity where you are asked to think honestly about the beliefs you have about a particular group of people.</p> <p>Step 1: Think of a particular ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social background, etc. that you feel you do not belong to and know the least about. Now take 10 minutes and write on a piece of paper what are your beliefs about this group of people. Be as honest as you can with yourself and write down as many things as you can. When you have finished, put the piece of paper aside.</p> <p>Step 2: Now think of a specific person who belongs to the group you chose in step 1 of this activity. If possible, choose someone from this group whom you know best. It can also be a famous person you follow. Now take a new sheet of paper and take 10 minutes to write down as many characteristics of this person as you can think of. You can also write down the things you noticed that you do not know about this person.</p> <p>Step 3: Now compare the two lists you have made and answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any differences between the two lists you made in step 1 and step 2? If so, what are they? • How many from the first list did you also include on the second list? • How was it different to think about a group and about an individual?










- Did you have enough information about the person when you made the second list, or did you find that you did not really know enough about them? If so, what do you think is the reason you know so little about this person. Are you interested in getting to know the person better?
- Did you find that you had any preconceived ideas or prejudices about the person because of their membership in the group you chose?
- Did your beliefs about the group you chose change after thinking about an individual member of that group? If so, how?
- Has this activity helped you to recognise assumptions you may have made about people from this group that are not necessarily true or fair?
- How do you think your beliefs about this group of people might affect your interactions with members of this group in your personal or professional life?

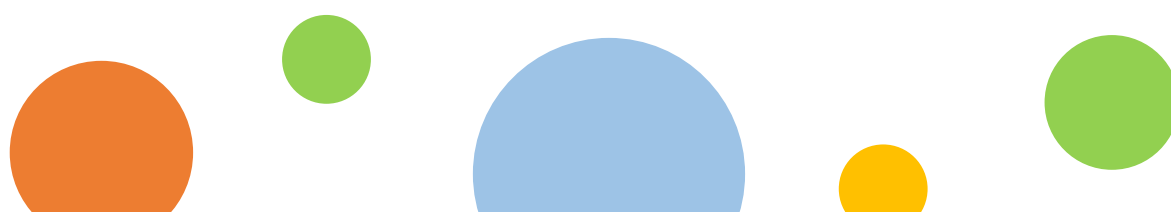
You can repeat this exercise with another group. It can help you to recognise your biases. When we know our biases, we can better avoid acting on them.





Activity Sheet 2

Activity Title	Visualisation game
Duration of activity in minutes	20 minutes
Learning Outcome	Through this activity you will learn about your unconscious expectations and how to change them.
Aim of activity	The aim of this activity is to become aware of your unconscious expectations and to challenge them by imagining counter stereotypical situations. Through this exercise you will transform situations from unexpected to expected and in this way be better prepared to accept diversity and inclusion in your everyday life.
Materials Required for Activity	
Step-by-step instructions	<p>Step 1: Read the text below. When you come to the symbol  close your eyes and visualise what you just read. It is important to truly create a mental picture.</p> <p>It is a beautiful sunny day, and you are walking in a park with a friend. In the rose garden you see a photographer taking pictures of a couple who have just got married.  You continue your walk and meet your friend's boss, with whom you have a short conversation.  After a while you sit down in a café and enjoy a nice coffee. A family is sitting next to your table, and you enjoy seeing the little baby being comforted when it cries. </p> <p>Now answer the questions: In your mind, what was the sexual orientation of the couple that got married? What ethnic group did your friend's boss belong to? Was it the same as your own sexuality/ethnic group or a completely different one? Was the person comforting the baby the baby's father?</p> <p>It is possible that you imagined what is stereotypical. Our brain creates images of what is familiar to us. But with our imagination we can challenge ourselves and make new images seem more familiar.</p> <p>Step 2: Now read another text below. This time keep in mind the diversity which opens a lot of new possibilities for your mental images. When you come to the symbol , stop and consciously</p>





create an image, that is different from what you would normally imagine.

You have bought a beautiful house and today you go to see the lawyer you hired to make the necessary arrangements for the deed. You are in the elevator of a large office building and a couple are riding with you. From their conversation, you understand that they are going to see a lawyer to finalise the adoption of their baby. You congratulate them on this happy news. 🙄 When you arrive at your lawyer's office, a friendly assistant greets you. They welcome you and fill out the joining form with you. 🙄 After a short wait, the office door opens, and your lawyer greets you. You immediately sense that the two of you will work well together. 🙄

Question for reflection:

- Was it difficult for you to include diversity in your imagination?
- What was the most difficult – gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation ...? Why do you think that is?
- How did you feel when you created more diverse mental pictures. Did it make you feel uncomfortable?

You can continue to play this visualisation game by making up your own scenarios. You can use this as a technique to prepare yourself to situations that might be unfamiliar to you.

The idea for this exercise was taken from Valerie Alexander's TED Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GP-cqFLS8Q4>





Additional Learning Resource

Title of Resource:	Free online Microsoft Unconscious bias training
Introduction to the resource:	This is a free online course that is part of Microsoft's Inclusion Journey, which offers unique perspectives from a variety of fields including human behaviour, sociology, and others. On the website, they share some of the things they discuss inside the company and aim to amplify the work of invited academics and thought leaders from outside Microsoft.
What will you get from using this resource?	The aim of this course is to raise awareness of unconscious bias and its impact on workplace dynamics and decision-making. The course is designed to facilitate reflection and provide strategies for disrupting and proactively counteracting our unconscious biases. As you progress through the modules, you will have opportunities to engage in exercises and activities that encourage you to challenge your assumptions and biases.
Link to resource:	https://mslearningcontent.microsoft.com/UnderstandingUnconsciousBias/story.html



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