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# **Inclusion in the UK workplace:** Common challenges and how to tackle them

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**Michael Page**

In partnership with  **VERCIDA**  
CONSULTING

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Sheri Hughes, PageGroup UK Diversity and Inclusion Director

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**Welcome to the latest in our series of eBooks**, where we take an in-depth look at a key area of the working world. In this edition, we have taken a deep-dive into diversity and inclusion (D&I), one of the most pertinent topics on the global business agenda today. In particular, we have put a clear focus on the inclusion aspect of D&I.

In our experience, it can be easy to believe that diversity and inclusion are one and the same thing. Whilst there is a close relationship between the two, it is important to understand the clear differences – and how putting a clear focus on one doesn't mean the other is symbiotically tackled as a result.

In exploring this area, we were mindful that inclusion is not just a large and multi-faceted topic, but also one with a broad span of opinions and approaches. Therefore, we wanted to start with a basis of data. This took the form of a survey of 2,000 UK adults, carried out in partnership with global D&I experts VERCIDA Consulting, to find out how included people truly feel at work.

In this eBook, we will outline the key findings of our research, with expert commentary and insights from VERCIDA Consulting's Director Dan Robertson. To see how your company stacks up against your sector's average, you can use our interactive Inclusivity Mapper tool by [clicking here](#).

We also outline the business case for D&I – including going back to basics and defining what the D and the I of D&I truly mean – explore challenges around unconscious bias and get practical tips and advice from VERCIDA on how any organisation can get started on improving inclusivity.

This is a journey that we ourselves at PageGroup have been on in recent years, both in terms of the way we advise our clients on their hiring challenges and within our own workforce. As it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and hire top talent, it has never been more important to actively seek out candidates from diverse groups and backgrounds.

At PageGroup, our successful Women@Page programme has seen the number of female operational managers increase from 42% in 2012 to 49% in 2018, and operational directors rise from 25% in 2012 to 42% in 2018. Building on the momentum of this scheme, we have also launched strategies around other key areas of D&I, including LGBT+, mental health, parents/carers, disability, and dynamic working. As the D&I agenda evolves, so does our approach and we're certainly not resting on our laurels.

To help equip your business with a diverse team of employees, our teams of specialist consultants are uniquely positioned to help drive your D&I strategy. On behalf of PageGroup in the UK, I hope you enjoy the read.

### **Sheri Hughes**

UK Diversity and Inclusion Director,  
PageGroup



### **About Dan Robertson, Director, VERCIDA Consulting**

As a director at a global consultancy that aims to transform the world of work into inclusive, innovative and high performing environments, Dan has a wealth of knowledge on how to boost inclusion and diversity in the business world. Using science and psychology to underpin the approach to inclusive management, Dan aims to challenge established ways of thinking around both diversity and inclusion. He contributed to the research which underpins this eBook in terms of shaping the questions for the survey, analysing the resultant data and informing our research on unconscious bias.

# SECTION 1:

## Drilling into the definitions:

What do diversity and inclusion **really** mean?

Before exploring the challenges that organisations can face around inclusion, we believe it's important to take a step back and begin with the fundamentals. When it comes to D&I, what does diversity actually mean? And then on to inclusion; what is the truest definition? How is it related to diversity – but also fundamentally different? We'll explore that here.

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## Defining Diversity

Diversity is simply about the range of individual and group differences that occupy organisational cultures. Many in the corporate world often reduce debates and actions on diversity to gender or ethnicity. However, our view is that while gender and ethnic diversity are indeed significant and pressing priorities for many business sectors, they are by no means the only factors that should be considered within the current debate. In order to create high performing teams and to reap the benefits of a diverse workforce, organisations should consider diversity from a holistic perspective.

Here we adopt the principle of “two-dimensional diversity”, as identified by the Center for Talent Innovation. Two-dimensional diversity includes:

- **Inherent diversity:** Includes factors such as gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation and age.
- **Acquired diversity:** Includes factors such as political beliefs, education, global experience and language skills.

Other factors that should be considered within the mix of both inherent diversity and acquired diversity include disability, someone’s gender identity – including trans-gender – as well as social background and work experience.

It’s also important to broaden out the definition to include ‘diversity of thinking’, as championed by Scott E. Page. He argues that diversity of thinking is a key ingredient of business creativity, problem-solving and innovation. Within this definition, we can include an individual’s work preferences and the extent to which teams comprise of a mix of introverts and extroverts who influence decision-making. In a global market place, decoding how people think when operating across cultures is critical, as explored by Erin Meyer in her influential book *The Culture Map*.

## Defining Inclusion

Two-dimensional diversity is required to produce innovation and creativity. However, two-dimensional diversity alone will not produce business creativity, innovation and financial reward. It is only when businesses align organisational diversity with cultures of inclusion that we see business outcomes. We can define inclusion as the extent to which organisations respect, value and leverage the ideas and insights from diverse team members.

Deloitte identifies inclusion as four related yet distinctive elements of workplace culture:

- **Fairness and respect:** Diverse employees work in a non-discriminatory work culture.
- **Valued and belonging:** Diverse employees feel valued and a sense of connection to the whole group.
- **Safe and open:** Diverse employees are able to speak up without fear of retaliation.
- **Empowering and growing:** Enabling diverse employees to do their best at work.

Work by VERCIDA Consulting has highlighted the importance of leadership in creating inclusive work cultures. They have identified six key traits of inclusive leaders:

1. **Inspire:** Leaders who take every opportunity to articulate the business performance benefits of diverse and inclusive teams.
2. **Integrity:** Leaders who are open about their weaknesses as well as their strengths and build team trust by speaking up when things are not fair.
3. **Insight:** Leaders who are keen to understand their own biases and to learn about the experiences of diverse team members.
4. **Inquisitive:** Leaders who pay attention to the unwritten rule and patterns of behaviours within their teams.
5. **Individualate:** Leaders who encourage connectivity and belonging by championing team events that bring people together.
6. **Invest:** Leaders who use KPIs to measure progress on diversity and who invest in team members through sponsorship and fair work allocation.

# SECTION 2:

## **Digging into the data: 5 key inclusion challenges facing UK employers**

In partnership with VERCIDA Consulting, recent PageGroup research explored the D&I sentiments of the UK workforce. Specifically, respondents were asked about the level of commitment their employer currently shows towards key areas of inclusion. The data highlighted five key challenges currently being faced by the UK workforce, which we've outlined in this section. Dan Robertson, Director of VERCIDA Consulting, has reviewed the findings and shares his insights on how these challenges are likely to have developed and what organisations can do to overcome them.

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# Challenge 1: Some industries struggle with D&I more than others

D&I within an organisation is typically headed up by the HR function. So HR, generally, would be closer to this subject than many other sectors – they would be leading on initiatives like inclusive talent attraction, retention, and promotional processes.



## Dan comments:

“In terms of historically moving the D&I agenda forward, a lot of the large consultancy firms like EY, PwC, and KPMG, as well as some of the big banks such as Barclays and HSBC, have been immersed in diversity and inclusion projects for some time. Therefore it is not a surprise that they would be in that top quartile. This makes sense considering all the work they have been doing and continue to do.

“Consultancy firms and financial organisations look at their resources in terms of talent, and there is now growing pressure from clients to have diverse project teams. There is a lot of action taking place to make sure that when they are hiring, they are thinking about diversity within the process.

“Logistics, however, is very operational, and depending on the role, is often based on the interconnectivity between people and machines. This sector has also been much more male-orientated and has therefore been slow to catch-up. Although the picture is clearly mixed, historically there has probably been less pressure on logistics firms to think about diversity and inclusion.

“The legal sector is more complex. We do see more women being appointed as associates as more women are now graduating from law school than men. However, we are not seeing this translate into partnership numbers at the rate we’d expect. There are some mid-career challenges that the sector still needs to deal with”.

To build our Inclusivity Mapper, we asked 2,000 UK workers to score their employer against a number of key inclusion criteria. Respondents were asked to rate their employer out of five against the following statements:

1. My employer is committed to diversity and inclusion initiatives
2. We practice inclusive hiring and offer bias-free career progression
3. I work in an inclusive culture that celebrates diversity
4. My company’s leaders are inclusive and promote a fair workplace
5. My employer facilitates cross team collaboration and connectivity

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Rank	Discipline	Average score across all 5 Qs
1	Human Resources	3.79
2	Finance	3.46
3	Consultancy, Strategy and Change	3.40
4	Business Support	3.39
5	Technology	3.38
6	Design and Development	3.38
7	Engineering and Manufacturing	3.38
8	Digital	3.38
9	Marketing	3.38
10	Facilities Management	3.37
11	Property and Construction	3.37
12	Fashion	3.37
13	Retail	3.37
14	Public Sector	3.37
15	Oil + Gas	3.37
16	Life Sciences	3.36
17	Legal	3.33
18	Logistics	3.25
19	Procurement and Supply Chain	3.23

\*Survey conducted in March 2019 across a sample size of over 2000 workers

# Challenge 2: Professionals at all levels of seniority report the same D&I challenges

Across the five D&I categories – **commitment, inclusive talent, inclusive culture, inclusive leadership,** and **connectivity** – we compared the results of senior professionals to those at the more junior level. Surprisingly, the results were almost identical.

Criteria	Senior roles avg score	Junior roles avg score
1. Commitment	3.17	3.17
2. Inclusive talent	3.49	3.49
3. Inclusive culture	3.4299	3.43
4. Inclusive leadership	3.41	3.41
5. Connectivity	3.32	3.32



### Dan comments:

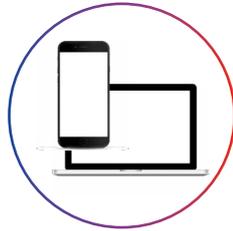
“These results are a call out to employers. There is still a job to do. Even though we see more women moving up the organisational tree, it doesn’t mean that they’re confident in existing processes and policies, or an organisation’s culture. This is interesting because what that says is: ‘Just because we see a rise in diversity, around gender in particular, this doesn’t mean that your diverse population has confidence in you, so we’re not seeing a rise in organisational inclusivity’. We need to have more women and people of colour, for example, in positions of authority. Right now, there are obviously not enough. So, I think the message to employers is you have to start working on your culture – building that sense of belonging.”



## Challenge 3: Employees don't feel comfortable to share the real reasons they are leaving their jobs



A **quarter** have withheld the true reasons for why they left a job – and this is highest amongst those aged 18-34 (40%), and those with an impairment or long-term health condition (43%)



**25%** of employees haven't resigned face-to-face



A **fifth** of workers have left a job as they didn't feel valued, **15%** felt the job impacted their mental health



### Dan comments:

"If you have a culture of honest feedback, overall it would increase the confidence of leavers to share reasons for leaving. This is because it wouldn't feel out of sync to be honest about your reasons for leaving. If an organisation doesn't have a culture of honest feedback, but then asks employees to share their reasons for leaving, then that would feel out of sync to be honest about your reasons for doing so. So, either they are not going to provide feedback or they are less likely to be as direct as an employer might want them to be, possibly out of fear of repercussions.

"Millennials don't have the mindset of 'a job for life' in the same way that the baby boomers have. If they're leaving simply because they just want an exciting role somewhere else, there's not necessarily one pinpoint or one driver for leaving; it's just about wanting to explore opportunities somewhere else.

"This is interesting for employers because when we think about what motivates individuals, there are a number of factors; one is financial reward, and one is to what extent do employees find joy in their work. Thus, the challenge to employers is how do they make their workplaces exciting, joyful, stimulating, and engaging for Millennials? Those are the defining factors that are going to keep them there. Some might be leaving for particular reasons but I think Millennials are just going to constantly be flipping around and job-hopping as that is the way they see the world of work."

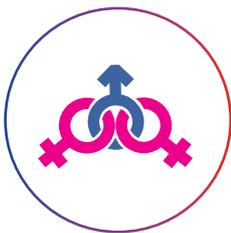
# Challenge 4: Office cliques are killing workplace morale



**Three-fifths** of workers (61%) have experienced feelings of exclusion within the workplace, most commonly office cliques (30%) or witnessing bullying or discrimination (21%)



Those with an impairment or long-term health condition are most likely to have experienced exclusion (76%), and women are more likely than men to have experienced this (63% v 58%)



A **third** of workers have felt negatively discriminated against at work (this rises amongst LGBT+ workers and those with Afro-Caribbean ethnicities)



## Dan comments:

“I think this is probably one of the most important findings from the research. We know that human beings have a natural gravitation to befriend people who are like them. In the workplace, this can evolve into cliques. The problem with cliques is the negative impact this can have on team bonds, morale and ultimately organisational decision-making.

“If not managed effectively, they can lead to a real sense of exclusion for some. Additionally, it’s easy to see how employees’ behaviours can move from cliques to bullying and discrimination.

“You can break up the dynamics of cliques by being aware of a couple of things. First of all, the office architecture – who sits where? If you have agile working – hot desking – that can actually break up a clique because you don’t have the same people sitting at the same desk all the time. Even when you’re doing project work, if you’re assigning the same people to the same project and you’ve got those people working together constantly and repetitively, that will enforce their relationship and can reinforce the clique. So, re-assigning different people to different projects and making sure they’re working with different groups is a strategy for breaking up some of those negative dynamics.

“Senior executives are often blind to these office cliques, simply because they don’t know what goes on at the day-to-day level. Line managers are more likely to have some line of sight, so I do think there is a mixed responsibility between line managers and employees as they’re the ones that see and experience it on a day-to-day basis. Executives are clearly responsible for role modelling and inclusive messaging, but I think when it comes to this, it’s the person you sit next to that probably has the greatest impact.”

# Challenge 5: Business leaders aren't necessarily driving the D&I agenda



**Only 34%** of C-level execs say their company has a D&I policy and know what it is.



## Dan comments:

“Given that executives develop strategies for businesses, I find it shocking that many said they do not have a D&I policy in place or aren't aware of what it is. D&I is not a 'nice to have'. The global marketplace is defined by certain factors. It is defined by complexity, uncertainty, and turbulence.

“Organisations have two big strategic assets; one is their clients or customers, and the other is their talent. And the client base is increasingly and radically becoming much more diverse, as is emerging and future talent. So, to not factor D&I into your strategic planning is a big error for executives – I would see this as a real business risk.

“It is already a legal requirement for companies to demonstrate that they have an organisational culture which is non-discriminatory based on the nine protected characteristics under the UK's Equality Act 2010. And so, a D&I policy would be something that all companies would be expected to have. I think what's interesting is that an organisation can have an anti-discrimination policy, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are actively promoting inclusion, it simply means they have put in place a legally required safety net, designed to ensure that they do not discriminate.

“I would be in favour of extending the principle of transparency and reporting across a range of different groups, because I think that's when we will get some further movement. I don't think we need many more legal requirements, but I do think an extension on things like Gender Pay Reporting would be quite useful.”



# SECTION 3:

## Building a Business Case for **Better Inclusion**

Understanding the key challenges your business is facing in relation to inclusion is a useful starting point. But businesses can be complex, particularly at the senior level. Therefore, if you have decided that improving inclusion is a priority, it's important to know how to build the commercial case for doing so, to ensure it is appropriately resourced and is given prominence on the business agenda.

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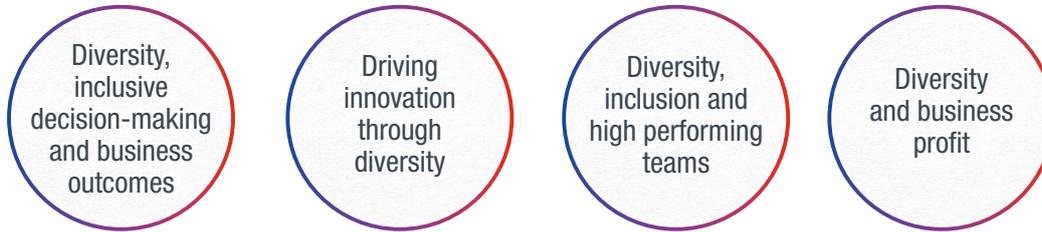
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In recent years, a growing body of research has emerged which stresses the business case for diverse and inclusive teams. In this section, we will summarise this work into four inter-related parts:



Here we explore each one in turn.

## Diversity, inclusive decision-making and business outcomes

When teams are populated, or even dominated, by individuals who look, sound and think the same, they are more likely to suffer from 'groupthink'. This narrows decision-makers' field of vision and reduces an organisation's ability to tap into the constantly changing needs and wants of their diverse customers and clients. 'Groupthink' restricts cross-cultural insights that are essential when developing products and services within a global market-place.

In a 2017 paper by the global consulting firm McKinsey and Co, team composition was identified as the starting point for creating high performing teams, of which diversity is a central element. The paper suggests that small teams of senior employees – fewer than six people – may be particularly vulnerable to poorer decision-making, because a lack of diversity leads to the team suffering from a lack of bandwidth in thinking.

This research is supported by work from the cloud-based decision-making platform Cloverpop, which has shown how diversity in teams, together with inclusive decision-making, significantly increases business performance.



Inclusive decision-making activates diversity to improve innovation, engagement, and performance across the enterprise. It gives outstanding companies the opportunity to make quantum leaps ahead of their competition.



There are a number of principles which underline Cloverpop's research. Firstly, they have shown how teams of individual decision-makers make better business decisions than individuals about 66% of the time. This is perhaps not surprising and aligns to research carried out by James Surowieck and shared within his influential work on the Wisdom of Crowds, in which he argues that groups of individuals make smarter decisions than individuals and that diversity of opinion amongst groups of individuals results in better decision-making.

**According to the study, teams of people are better at:**

- Identifying new and better choices that were not previously considered, resulting in a better decision
- Bringing more perspectives, experience, and information, which helps to reduce cognitive biases and improves accountability
- Making smarter decisions as the diversity of the team increases

Whilst many research studies focus solely on the relationship between gender diversity and business outcomes, Cloverpop were able to measure decision-making outcomes using a wider range of diversity characteristics, including age and geographical location.

Further research by Deloitte University Press stresses **three key benefits** to organisational performance of diversity of thought:

**1** It helps guard against 'groupthink' and expert overconfidence:

Diversity of thought can help organisations make better decisions and complete tasks more successfully because it triggers more careful and creative information processing than typically occurs in homogeneous groups.

**2** It helps increase the scale of new insights:

Generating a great idea often requires connecting multiple tasks and ideas together in a new way. Technological advances, such as crowdsourcing and gamification, are enabling new ways to bring the diversity of human thinking to bear on challenging problems.

**3** It helps organisations identify the right employees who can best tackle their most pressing problems:

Advances in neuroscience mean that matching people to specific jobs based on more rigorous cognitive analysis is within reach. Organisations that can operationalise faster ideation can begin to purposely align individuals to certain teams and jobs simply because of the way they think.



# Driving innovation through diversity

A 2017 study by Boston Consulting Group – The Mix that Matters: Innovation Through Diversity – found a positive relationship between diversity and business innovation. Measuring outcomes from 171 companies, the study found a statistically significant relationship between management diversity and business innovation, meaning that companies with higher levels of diversity get more revenue from new products and services.

## Specifically, the research found:

The innovation boost isn't limited to a single type of diversity. The presence of managers who are female or from other countries, industries, or companies can cause an increase in innovation.

Management diversity seems to have a particularly positive effect on innovation at complex companies – those that have multiple product lines or that operate in multiple industry segments. Diversity's impact also increases with company size.

At companies with diverse management teams, openness to contributions from lower-level workers and an environment in which employees feel free to speak their minds are crucial in fostering innovation.

Writing in *Scientific America*, in an article entitled *How Diversity Makes Us Smarter*, Katherine W. Phillips from Columbia Business School cites the following:

The key to understanding the positive influence of diversity is the concept of informational diversity. When people are brought together to solve problems in groups, they bring different information, opinions and perspectives. The same logic applies to social diversity. People who are different from one another in race, gender and other dimensions bring unique information and experiences to bear on the task at hand.

Research has shown how gender diversity at the top firms in Standard & Poor's Composite 1500 list increases "innovation intensity".

A study of 177 national banks in the U.S. found that for innovation-focused banks, increases in racial diversity were clearly related to enhanced financial performance.

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# Diversity, inclusion and high performing teams

Following the success of Google's Project Oxygen, where its People Analytics team studied the key dynamics of 'what makes a great manager', the search giant launched Project Aristotle, a two-year study on team performance. Google wanted to research the key factors which create and sustain high performing teams. The overarching factor of a high performing team is the level of 'psychological safety' that exists between team members. Psychological safety is defined as the extent to which colleagues feel able to take risks in the interest of the business without fear of judgement from teammates.

Psychological safety, and the positive impact on team performance, is closely aligned to a sense of belonging from diverse individuals within teams.

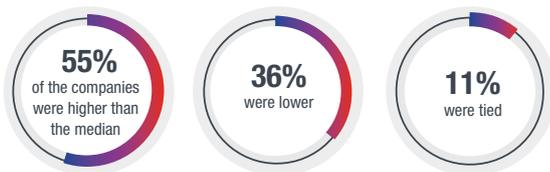
As stressed by Alex Pentand from MIT, the number one predictor of team performance – more than skills and intelligence – is what he calls 'belonging cues'; equal air time in team meetings, eye contact between colleagues and non-hierarchical communication.

## Diversity and business profit

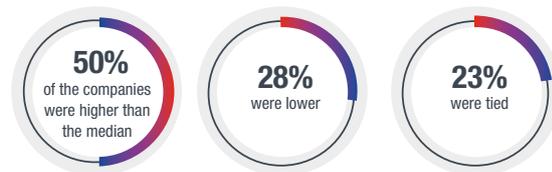
A study by the global not-for-profit Catalyst found that companies with the most female board directors outperformed those with the least in return on sales (ROS) by 16% and return on invested capital (ROIC) by 26%.

Researchers at Pepperdine University found that organisations on Fortune's list of 'the 100 Most Desirable MBA Employers for Women' outperformed the industry medians on numerous financial measures, including:

### Profits as a percentage of revenue:



### Profits as a percentage of assets:



A 2017 Peterson Institute for International Economics study found that companies with at least 30% female leaders can add as much as 6% to their net margins.

The Center for Talent Innovation examined 40 business case studies and found that publicly traded companies with two-dimensional diversity were:

- 45% more likely than those without to have expanded market share in the past year
- 70% more likely to have captured a new market
- 158% more likely to understand target end-users when their team contained one or more members who actually represented that group

Finally, research from McKinsey and Co in 2018 found that companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on executive teams are:

- 21% more likely to outperform their national industry median on earnings before interest and taxes margin
- 27% more likely to outperform on economic profit margin

In relation to culturally diverse executive teams, these were 33% more likely to outperform their peers on profitability.

# SECTION 4:

## **Avoiding unconscious bias: Removing barriers to workplace diversity and inclusion**

You might think that identifying your D&I challenges and then committing to change is all you need to do to improve the inclusivity of your organisation. However, unconscious bias also has a big role to play. This is a type of bias that happens automatically, outside of a person's control. Here we look at how to recognise and reflect on your own unconscious biases.

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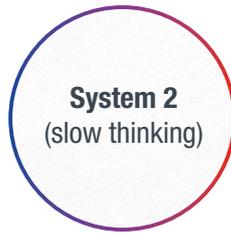


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Work by behavioural psychologists such as Daniel Kahneman has re-shaped our understanding of human behaviour and decision-making. Rather than being rational and objective, human behaviour and decision-making is hampered by a set of cognitive biases. For Kahneman, humans depend on a dual processing system for thinking and decision-making, which he describes as System 1 and System 2 thinking.



is governed by emotion, intuition and impulse.



is partly designed to regulate the impulsive nature of System 1 and is governed by logic and deliberation.

Kahneman describes how human decision-making is governed by a complex process of pattern recognition, or what he calls 'heuristics'. Harvard psychologists Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald have shown how these heuristics or, what they term 'mind-bugs', are formed through a natural tendency to place individuals into social categories. These categories are often based on visual cues such as gender, cultural background, age, height or body size. We also categorise based on social background, job roles, religious identity or political affiliation. Once formed, social categories can influence our perceptions, attitudes, judgements, behaviours and decisions.

## Implicit associations and biased decision-making

The unconscious brain uses social categories to make implicit, or unconscious judgements about people who are similar to us and people who are different from us. Critically, we are more likely to form positive associations towards people who look, sound and think like us. We are also more likely to form negative associations towards people who are different from us.

### For example:

- Constant exposure to images and stories of men as lawyers, doctors, accountants, detectives, plumbers or bus drivers via the media, personal encounters and work environments, re-enforce our implicit associations resulting in what is often referred to as 'hard-wired' bias
- Out-dated stereotypes also continue to influence perceptions of women at work. For instance, charity workers, carers, primary school teachers, cleaners or shop assistants
- These implicit associations then influence expectations of who should be accountants, plumbers, carers or shop assistants, within hiring decisions

### Unconscious bias plays out in four key areas at work:

#### Recruitment:

We are simply more likely to hire people who are 'like us'. This likeability factor changes from culture to culture.

#### Work allocation:

Managers are more likely to assign key projects to individuals within their teams who they have an unconscious affinity with.

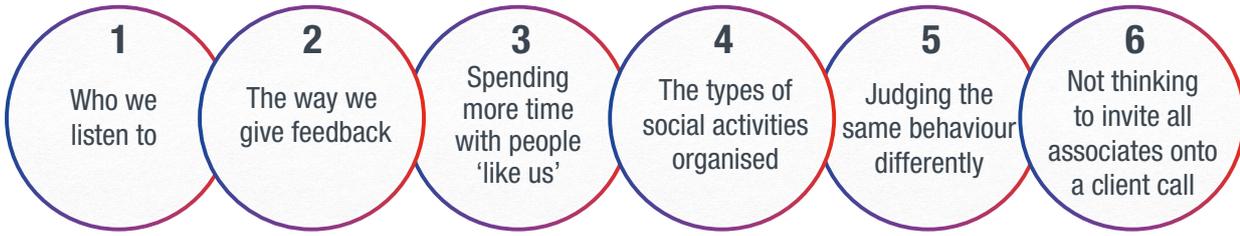
#### Performance management:

Managers are more likely to spend time informally discussing contributions to the team and will focus on development and future work plans. For those employees for which managers have little affinity, past performance is more likely to be questioned.

#### Informal sponsorship:

Managers are more likely to informally coach, mentor and sponsor, colleagues who think and work like them over colleagues who do not.

In addition to these formal decision-making frameworks, biases play out in what Mary Rowe from MIT terms 'micro-behaviours'. **Examples include:**



In a complex and rapidly changing world, these biases are likely to impact team engagement and performance, and in turn have a negative knock-on effect on business innovation, growth and client relationships.

There are many types of cognitive and social biases which impact hiring and in work decision-making. **The key ones include:**

**Affinity bias:** The tendency to hire people who are like us. Often called the 'mini-me' effect, affinity bias plays out when people are similar to us – culture, background, personality – or remind us of someone we like. For example, hiring managers are more likely to hire a candidate who graduated from the same university as they did or a candidate who has worked in a sector they are familiar with, and have positive associations of.

**Anchoring:** The tendency to rely heavily on first impressions when making a decision. In recruitment, the anchor could simply be the type of person already 'in mind' to fill the vacant position. Once set, the anchor influences the entire recruitment process from job design to final appointment.

**Attribution error:** The tendency to relate behaviours to personality rather than the situation the person might be in. For example, if a person is nervous in an interview, the interviewer may assume that the person is of a nervous disposition. The interviewer is more likely to do this if the candidate is unlike them, and less likely to do this if the person is similar to them. Hence attribution error is more likely to impact candidates who are different from us.

**Confirmation bias:** The tendency to look for (or interpret) information which confirms existing thoughts and beliefs. For example, a first impression of a candidate may be formed by reading a CV or an application form. At the interview, panel members will often ask questions which are designed to confirm the first impressions. Beyond recruitment, confirmation bias impact a manager's perceptions of employees' skills, ambitions and motivations.

**Selective perception:** Often informed by in-group bias and affinity bias, this is a process whereby managers pay more attention to information from employees that fit their existing world views, whilst ignoring or disregarding information that challenges existing thoughts, values and beliefs. The outcome is that selective perception positively impacts employees who are similar to the manager, whilst negatively impacting an organisation's stated ambition of creating inclusive work cultures.

**Double binds:** The gender bias influences perceptions of gender roles and leadership. The types of attributes we ascribe to the ideal leader in most organisations are closely linked to perceivably positive male characteristics: decisive, assertive and independent. A number of research studies have shown that women who excel in traditional male domains may be viewed as competent, but when they demonstrate similar leadership traits, they are seen as less likeable to their male colleagues. In short, the types of behaviours that we often value in men such as self-confidence appears as arrogance in women.

**Gender benevolence:** The tendency to make assumptions and decisions about women, which appear positive, but in practice damage their careers. For example, male (and sometimes female) managers may not assign a global project with extensive travel to a female colleague who has recently returned from maternity leave, assuming that she would not wish to be away from her new child.

**Halo effect:** This occurs when we find one attribute really attractive in a job candidate or in an employee, which then colours our view of the individual's total skills and competencies. For example, if an employee has high analytic skills (if we value this) we may assume that they will put together a slick client presentation, when in fact, these are two separate skill sets.

**Representative heuristic:** A classic cognitive bias, this occurs when an individual is representative of (looks like, sounds like) the population they are being recruited or promoted into. For example, if an organisation is promoting an individual into a senior manager role in a global manufacturing company that is dominated by white, tall, and middle-class men, the individual (if they are male, white, tall and middle-class) is likely to benefit from this particular bias. Those who are different – e.g., women, people of different cultural groups – will not have the same advantages.

**Status quo bias:** Status quo bias is a bias towards the familiar and a preference for things to stay the same. For example, a preference for working with the same colleagues on new projects.

# SECTION 5:

## **Summary:** Five tips for creating a more inclusive workplace environment

As we have discussed, improving the inclusivity of an organisation requires a long-term commitment to change. There are multiple facets to this and there is certainly no one-size-fits-all solution. However, there are some simple steps you can take to get started on your journey.

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Defining diversity

SECTION 2  
Five challenges

SECTION 3  
Building a business case

SECTION 4  
Unconscious bias

SECTION 5  
Summary

FOCUS ON  
**INCLUSION**

# 1. Promote inclusive leadership

Diversity and inclusion must be filtered from the top down within an organisation. Considering this, in order to create a more inclusive workplace, it is important to consider the following questions:

Do we have leaders who demonstrate the principles of inclusive leadership?

Do we have leaders who role model inclusivity and inclusive behaviours on an everyday level?

These are the people who set the culture and tone of the business. It is important that diversity is reflected at the top and that inclusion is valued, and demonstrated by these professionals.

If people at the top of the tree aren't diverse, it can send the message to employees that there isn't room for them to grow and excel.

# 2. Embed supportive processes

With strong leadership in place, it is key to assess the practical processes that are in place to support inclusivity in your business.

**For example, dynamic working.** A dynamic working policy highlights to professionals that those with children or other out of work responsibilities can flex their work patterns. This is a real indicator in terms of your commitment to D&I and helps organisations to retain diverse talent. Mentoring and sponsorship programmes are also useful tools when seeking to nurture and retain diverse talent.

# 3. Be proactive

Assess where your business is at on the inclusion journey, then take steps to rectify any gaps.

## Ask yourself:

'Do we have sponsorship programmes which are aimed at increasing diverse groups up the organisation pipeline?'

## Ask yourself:

'How do we utilise the knowledge we have in our employee network groups?' If resourced well these groups can be a wealth of knowledge and creativity, leading to business innovation. They can also provide insight into the unwritten rules that define the workplace culture.



## 4. Enforce a zero-tolerance policy

It is impossible to have an organisational culture that is inclusive, if you don't have a zero-tolerance attitude and policy to bullying and harassment. Many professionals do not have the confidence to report inappropriate behaviours, which is why it is important to have visible policies and processes in place that will enable employees to anonymously report.

Commit to a **zero-tolerance attitude** and act on it.

Considering the male-dominated cultures within some sectors, a zero-tolerance policy is key. This includes any micro behaviours such as name calling, catcalling, as well as commenting on a female's appearance or clothing. Ultimately, these behaviours define the culture of a business and whether people feel part of that culture or not.

Do your leaders acknowledge that this is inappropriate or pass it off as banter? Dominant groups need to be mindful of their behaviours, they are the ones that often set the workplace culture.

## 5. Adopt an inclusive recruitment process

Often when hiring, we look at the people that we've hired previously as the types of people that we want to hire in the future. This bias often becomes embedded within job descriptions.

**For example**, searching for a candidate with five years' experience in construction or five years' experience in logistics. These industries are populated by men, so this rule may automatically skew the job description towards men as opposed to women. This then becomes a barrier to talent attraction.

**When writing a job description, ask yourself:** 'Do we really need that five or three years' experience, or can we focus on the actual skills that we are looking for?'

While hiring for diversity can take longer due to the need for a more creative approach, it is essential for businesses to focus on this in order to drive change. Diversity should be reflected in all shortlists.

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We hope you have found this eBook an insightful and informative read. **At PageGroup, diversity and inclusion (D&I) sit at the heart of our hiring processes.** With over 40 years of recruitment experience, our team of over 1,000 frontline recruiters are well-placed to advise on how to attract, hire and retain diverse talent. To contact one of our recruiters to discuss your hiring challenges, **[click here](#)**.

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