



Distinguishing Implicit from Explicit Biases in Modern Workforce Management: Mitigation Strategies to Prevent its Negative Impact and Promote Meritocracy

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Abstract. This paper explores the pervasive and insidious nature of bias in the modern workplace by examining the intricacies of unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias. Despite attempts to promote meritocracy, fairness, and inclusion in modern workforce management efforts, biases continue to affect employment decisions, collegiality, civility, and organizational cultures. This paper delves into the nuances of each type of bias to distinguish between them, while discussing how they manifest, intersect, and impact individuals and organizations. Topics explored include affinity bias, halo effect, confirmation bias, association bias, disability bias, anchoring bias, name bias, etc. Specific cases and examples relate to the hiring of women and other disadvantaged workers in places such as the United States and Afghanistan. Through a comprehensive and multifaceted methodological review of existing literature and case studies, this paper provides insights into the strategies and interventions that can mitigate the effects of bias in the workplace. It highlights the importance of awareness, education, periodic training, and accountability in addressing biases, and emphasizes the need for ongoing efforts to create a culture of inclusion and respect. The paper concludes by offering recommendations for organizations seeking to create a fair, merit-based, and inclusive workplace where all employees can thrive. Specific suggestions, implications, and recommendations are provided to prevent unconscious, implicit, and explicit biases from negatively impacting collegiality, camaraderie, and teamwork.

Keywords: Automatic pilot, Discrimination, Explicit bias, Implicit bias, Mental tapes, Socialization, Unconscious bias.

1. INTRODUCTION

Managers and human resource (HR) professionals need to become aware of unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias because these predispositions can have a profound impact on the way they interact with employees, make decisions, and shape the work environment (Siocon, 2023; Kohn, 2020; Shin, 2019). Unconscious biases can negatively influence hiring decisions, performance evaluations, and promotions, leading to unfair outcomes and non-compliance violations with federal laws related to disparate treatment and adverse impact (Daumeyer et al., 2019). Implicit biases can also perpetuate stereotypes and unfair behaviors, while explicit biases can create a toxic and stressful work environment that causes insecurity, dissatisfaction, and high employee turnover (Rasool, 2021; Redmond & McGuinness, 2019; Forscher et al., 2019; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). “Unfortunately, our social and cultural environment is hostile and prejudiced towards certain groups of people. So, intentions aside, we make bad or unfair judgments all the time” (Test Gorilla, 2025, para. 14).

By becoming aware of implicit and explicit biases, managers and HR experts in agile organizations can take proactive and strategic steps to mitigate their impact and create a fairer and more inclusive workplace for all employees regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, or other such characteristics (Aaman et al., 2024; Cavico et al., 2017; Muffler et al., 2010). For example, in any of today’s multinational corporations (MNC) or medium-size enterprise workplace, employees are likely to come from different cultures. Consequently, cultural bias is likely to be a concern for employees and their managers. Cultural bias is when people are stereotyped based on “their country of origin, religion, or ethnic background without actually looking into their skills or performance levels”, which “involves a prejudice or highlighted distinction in viewpoint that suggests a preference of one culture over another and can be described as discriminative” (Harvard “Understanding Unconscious Bias”, 2025, para. 5).

Awareness of unconscious, implicit, and explicit biases is essential for managers and HR professionals because it can help them make more informed decisions, improve employee relationships, and drive sustainable business outcomes (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023). By recognizing and addressing biases ingrained in people or digital technologies, they can build a talented team along with an inclusive workplace, which can lead to increased innovation, creativity, and productivity (Khanfar et al., 2024). Additionally, awareness of biases can help managers and HR professionals to develop more effective workforce management strategies, improve employee engagement and retention, and reduce the risk of lawsuits. Ultimately, becoming aware of biases is a critical step towards creating a fair, inclusive, and high-performing workplace. Human resources analytics can be a good way to keep track of incidents and to prevent concerns related to unconscious, implicit, and explicit biases.

HR metrics and analytics can be used to track employee attraction, hiring, retention, development, and retirement (Vargas et al., 2018). Using metrics and assessments, human resource professionals can serve as strategic partners for workforce growth and succession planning (Vargas, 2015). Discrimination can occur unintentionally, especially when a neutral policy or practice disproportionately and negatively affects a particular

protected group's members (Cavico et al., 2017; Mujtaba, 2022). Using HR analytics, leaders and managers can enhance employee retention and inclusion, while also reducing the risk of legal liabilities and reputational damage (Bauer et al., 2024). Violations of any laws, through adverse impact or disparate treatment, can lead to discrimination, unhappiness, and employee turnover (Mujtaba, 2024). The awareness of local and federal laws can be a starting point in any workplace, and its prevention the end goal.

The root causes and problems of discrimination concerns in the workplace are intricate and varied (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023). Harrison-Bernard et al. (2020) assert that unconscious prejudice is a critical component influencing decision-making, recruiting, and promotion processes. Unconscious prejudice denotes automatic, unconscious stereotypes or attitudes towards specific groups, perhaps resulting in preferential treatment for certain employees and the exclusion of others. These predispositions frequently function unconsciously, fostering discriminatory practices and constraining heterogeneity.

The fundamental issues and obstacles in attaining a merit-based and inclusionary workforce arise from systemic factors as well as technological constraints. Unconscious biases and established practices frequently lead to unequal treatment of certain groups, posing challenges for organizations striving for authentic justice and desperateness (Bauer et al., 2024; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Policies that limit career progression, disparities in compensation frameworks, and insufficient representation in leadership positions intensify these issues. The interplay of systemic barriers and historical trends in job segregation plays a significant role in perpetuating ongoing inequalities across various industries.

Modern technologies, used with human resource analytics, have the potential to monitor employee life cycles and identify representation gaps; however, effective implementation necessitates careful and transparent data management. To transparently and effectively tackle the challenges of real or perceived unfair treatment or discrimination, it is essential to recognize unconscious biases and systemic barriers while also developing and applying relevant strategies that foster a more inclusive work environment for everyone. This requires ongoing assessment, training, fair hiring practices, and the application of HR analytics to recognize and address any apparent disparities. HR analytics serves a significant function by delivering insights into representation disparities, pay gaps, and career advancement opportunities, allowing organizations to make informed, data-driven decisions that promote inclusivity. Experts (Bauer et al., 2024) regularly highlight that addressing complex and intricate people and legal challenges requires ongoing and intentional actions from managers and organizations to break down established systems of inequality and foster an inclusive culture across the workplace.

Understanding implicit biases in the workplace is essential because these unconscious attitudes and stereotypes can influence decision-making, interactions, and opportunities, often leading to inequitable outcomes. For researchers, recognizing implicit biases helps ensure that studies and findings are not skewed or perpetuate harmful stereotypes. For employees, awareness promotes healthier collaboration, reduces misunderstandings, and fosters inclusivity. For managers, understanding implicit biases is critical to making fair hiring, promotion, and policy decisions, which can improve workplace morale, heterogeneity, and overall productivity. Addressing implicit biases helps create a merit-based and respectful environment where all individuals can thrive.

2. LITERATURE

The terms implicit bias, unconscious bias, explicit bias, meritocracy, and even discrimination can at times confuse some managers and harm others in promotional opportunities (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023; Cavico et al., 2017). As such, they must be clarified since they are terms that deal with many forms of discrimination such as sex, religion, ethnicity, disability, etc. in the modern workplace (Muffler et al., 2010). Therefore, policies and training programs should be in place to create awareness, enhance teamwork, prevent both intentional and unintentional forms of discrimination, while attracting and retaining the best top talent through meritocracy. Strategically designed modern workforce management practices that are merit-based can, do, and should foster a positive work environment for today's dynamic organizations (Mujtaba & Lawrence, 2024; Bendick et al., 2010).

Meritocracy, in the context of mitigating implicit and explicit biases in modern workforce management, refers to a system where decisions regarding hiring, promotions, and evaluations are based on objective measures of individual performance, skills, and qualifications rather than on subjective judgments influenced by personal biases or social identities. By prioritizing transparent criteria, standardized assessments, and reasonable opportunities, a meritocratic approach will minimize the impact of unconscious typecasts and unfair practices, thereby fostering a more inclusive and impartial workplace that values competence and contribution over personal connections or demographic factors.

Legal discrimination refers to differential treatment based on job-relevant criteria such as education, experience, or performance, factors that are directly tied to legitimate business needs and are applied consistently in a transparent manner across all candidates or employees (Mujtaba, 2022). *Illegal discrimination*, on the other hand, involves unfavorable treatment based on protected characteristics such as race, gender, age, disability, or national origin, as outlined by equal employment laws within a country. This type of discrimination, whether explicit or resulting from unconscious bias, undermines fairness and impartiality in the workplace and, in the United States, it is prohibited under laws like Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA), and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA).

Various forms of implicit and explicit biases and stereotypes negatively influence how employees are perceived in professional settings, which can adversely affect opportunities for advancement and overall job satisfaction of some candidates due to their protected categories (Siocon, 2023). Workplace discrimination disproportionately affect female professionals, due to barriers such as the “glass ceiling” and implicit biases (Uru et al., 2024). Consequently, women report higher levels of dissatisfaction and job stress related to job insecurity, unequal pay, and few promotional opportunities into higher ranks (Kohn, 2020; Riccardi, 2023; Brakus et al., 2022). Women are more likely to experience workplace gender-based microaggressions and biases (Shin, 2019).

The presence of gender unfairness can be observed from the fact that, despite many highly qualified candidates, no female politician has yet been appointed as President in the United States. The unprecedented election losses of the presidency in the U.S. by two highly qualified female politicians (Senator Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Vice President Kamila Harris in 2024) to the non-politician, outsider male populist candidate (Donald J. Trump) demonstrates the existence of some gender bias among the general American population. These political losses by such competent individuals also demonstrate that professional women often must become “superwomen” or overachievers just to be perceived as equal with an average male counterpart. Much coaching, mentoring, and inclusionary affirmative action type of encouraging work needs to be done to create a level playing field for women in our male-dominated society.

Unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias are three related but distinct concepts that refer to the ways in which attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes can influence one’s judgments and decisions. One example of bias can be seen in what is known as the “horns effect”, or people’s tendency to notice one bad behavior or action about a person and “form a complete view of them based on that single negative attribute, letting it cloud our opinions of all of their other attributes” (Harvard “Understanding Unconscious Bias”, 2025, para. 7). The “horns effect”, is the opposite of the bias known as the “halo effect”, or one’s tendency to draw a general positive impression about an individual based on one single trait (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023). A person’s skill or personality assumptions based on physical appearance can be another form of implicit bias since “attractive” individuals do seem to get some unearned privileges that are not afforded to others (Cavico et al., 2013; Agerström & Rooth, 2011). This is like what is known as “anchoring bias,” or people’s tendency to make judgements about a person’s personality based on the first insight learned about a candidate, such as his/her physical appearance or level of education. Understanding the differences between the various concepts and biases is essential for recognizing and addressing inherent predispositions in ourselves and others.

2.1. Unconscious Bias

In simple terms, we can say that unconscious bias is the “snap judgements we make about people and situations based upon years of subconscious socialization” (Harvard “Understanding Unconscious Bias”, 2025, para. 1). People’s brains are automatically conditioned to make quick decisions based on a variety of conditioned assumptions gleaned during socialization without consciously being aware of it. So, human beings are automatically influenced through their mental tapes (or conditioned responses hard wired in the brain) in each decision they make. These unconscious or implicit biases that people have are not deliberately created by them, but rather each implicit bias is a product of the “brain’s definition of normal, acceptable or positive”, which are shaped by many factors during one’s socialization period (Harvard “Understanding Unconscious Bias”, 2025).

In general, unconscious bias refers to the automatic, unintentional, and unconscious ways in which our brains process information and make decisions (Mujtaba, 2022). This type of bias is often rooted in our cultural and social upbringing and can be influenced by factors such as media representation, social norms, and personal experiences. For example, a hiring manager or academic administrator may unconsciously favor candidates who share similar characteristics, such as education or work experience, without even realizing it. The following are examples of unconscious bias:

1. *Affinity bias*: A manager, Mariam, is more likely to mentor and provide opportunities to employees who share similar interests or backgrounds as hers, without realizing that she's overlooking other talented employees.
2. *Halo effect*: A hiring manager, Aziz, is impressed by a candidate's impressive education credentials and unconsciously assumes that they will excel in all aspects of the job, without thoroughly evaluating their other qualifications.
3. *Confirmation bias*: A team leader, Somi, has a preconceived notion that a particular team member, Zaki, is not a strong contributor. She unconsciously focuses on Zaki’s mistakes and overlooks his accomplishments, reinforcing her initial bias.
4. *Anchoring bias*: A salary negotiation team, led by Yusef, unconsciously relies too heavily on the initial salary request made by a job candidate, rather than considering the candidate's qualifications and market rates.
5. *Name bias*: A hiring manager, Fiza, is more likely to invite candidates with traditionally "American sounding" names such as “William” or “Dean” for an interview, without realizing that she's unconsciously discriminating against candidates with non-traditional names (i.e., Indian, Arab, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, etc.).

These examples illustrate how unconscious biases can influence a manager or employee's daily decisions and interactions, often without the decision-maker even realizing it. Stereotypical thinking in each culture can impact all professionals, including in the healthcare industry (Zhao, 2021), as well as everyone in the academic environment where students often select a major in their college education through implicit biases (Zack et al., 2024). Empirical research has shown that cultural engagement is important for effective teaching, student learning and clarification of confusing concepts, as well as for becoming effective policy makers, managers, and leaders in the workplace (Evan et al., 2025; Mujtaba, 2024). Even though one may hear discussions about foreigners from different cultures entering a country regularly, different interpretation due to language issues (Fox New, 2025), coupled with unconscious biases related to migrants can be confusing and dangerous at times when police officers and government agents attempt to keep terrorists out of the country (Oswald et al., 2013). In trying to enhance cultural competency, reduce fears, and provide some clarity on the term "immigrants," Castaneda and Jenks (2025, para. 4-12) provide the following insights and explanations:

1. The terms immigrants and migrants are often used interchangeably. Migration indicates movement in general. Immigration is the word used to describe the process of a non-citizen settling in another country.
2. A migrant is an individual who moves from their place of birth to another location relatively far away.
3. Internally displaced people (IDP) can be individuals who are forced to move within their own country because of violence, natural disasters and other reasons.
4. The terms "undocumented immigrants, unauthorized immigrants and illegal immigrants" refer to migrants who enter or remain in the country without the proper legal paperwork. People in this category also include those who come to a country legally with a visa and overstay its permitted duration. For example, in Thailand, tourists from the U.S. can legally stay there for 30 days upon entry, but if they stay for a few more days due to flight delays or an illness, then a fine per each day of violation is imposed on them during their exit at the airport. Of course, intentional and prolonged violations of the 30-day rule might lead a person to being banned from coming back.
5. An asylum seeker is a person who arrives at a port of entry – via an airport or a border crossing – and asks for protection because they fear returning to their home country. Traditionally, asylum seekers have been able to legally stay in the U.S. while they wait to bring their case to an immigration judge.
6. Refugees are like asylum seekers, but they apply to resettle in the U.S. while they remain abroad.
7. Immigration detention refers to the government apprehending immigrants who are in a country without authorization and holding them in public or privately-operated centers that might appear like a prison.
8. A coyote is the Spanish word for a guide who is paid by migrants and asylum seekers to take them to their destination, undetected by law enforcement.

Besides reducing uncertainty and anxiety which are present in today's American workforce (Ornek & Esin, 2020; McKay & Avery, 2015), "Understanding the many different immigration terms – some technical, some not – can help people better understand immigration news" and make accurate conscious decisions that are aligned with a country's laws (Castaneda and Jenks, 2025, para. 2). It is crucial for students, researchers, and government officials to understand the definitions of terms such as migrant, refugee, and asylum seeker, as these terms are often misused or conflated, leading to confusion, misinformation, and potentially harmful policies. Understanding the distinct definitions of these terms is essential for consciously developing effective and humane policies that address the complex issues surrounding migration. For instance, refugees are individuals fleeing persecution, war, or natural disasters, and are entitled to international protection, whereas migrants may be moving for economic or social reasons. Using these terms incorrectly can perpetuate negative stereotypes, fuel xenophobia, and undermine the rights and dignity of vulnerable populations. By understanding the precise meanings of these terms, government officials can consciously and strategically craft policies that are informed, nuanced, and respectful of human rights. Similarly, clarifying the concepts of unconscious, implicit, and explicit biases through effective written and oral communication can provide clarity and better discussions regarding the existence of stereotypes in a multicultural workforce (Langaas and Mujtaba, 2023).

Implicit bias toward migrants and asylum seekers in the United States stems largely from sociocultural stereotypes and misinformation perpetuated over time. Media narratives and political rhetoric often portray migrants as threats to economic stability, public safety, or cultural identity, reinforcing fear and prejudice. These depictions can paint asylum seekers as burdens on social systems or link them to crime, despite evidence showing that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born citizens. Additionally, stereotypes about migrants being "illegal" or unwilling to assimilate perpetuate biases rooted in xenophobia and a lack of understanding about the legal complexities of migration and asylum.

Another significant cause is the limited personal interaction many Americans have with migrants and asylum seekers. When people lack direct exposure to isolated or disadvantaged groups, they are more likely to rely on stereotypes and implicit associations shaped by their environment. Structural factors, such as segregated communities, exacerbate this lack of interaction, making it harder for individuals to develop empathy or challenge preconceived notions. Implicit biases are further reinforced by historical discrimination against certain immigrant groups, which continues to influence attitudes and policies today. Together, these factors create a cycle of implicit or explicit bias that marginalizes migrants and asylum seekers in society.

2.2. Implicit Bias

It has been said that the human brain is an intelligent organ, which likes to take shortcuts in decision-making based on previously learned information. Of course, taking a shortcut is not “always out of laziness or negligence; sometimes, decisions need to be made as quickly as possible to ensure survival, or to make tight deadlines” (Test Gorilla, 2025, para. 8). The reality is that,

Processing and evaluating information take up mental energy that we’re often unable, or too lazy, to spare. If there’s a pre-existing assumption in your unconscious mind that might help you reach a decision quickly, there’s a high chance you’ll yield to it and make a biased call (Test Gorilla, 2025, para. 9).

The term implicit bias was originally coined in 1995 by two social psychologists named Mahzarin Banaji and Tony Greenwald. Banaji and Greenwald (1995) claimed that social behavior is mostly shaped by unconscious associations and beliefs, which influence a person’s decisions without one noticing it since the brains take shortcuts. Since the human brain is often bombarded with about 11 million pieces of information in any given second, it can only process about 40 pieces, and thus resorts to shortcuts (Norton Healthcare, 2023). Mental shortcuts are necessary for daily operations and survival, and they can automatically lead to biases, especially when people are under pressure to take urgent action or when they are multitasking.

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Implicit biases are thoughts and feelings we are unaware of, which automatically influence our judgements and decisions as professionals in various industries. Implicit biases are based on our personal preferences and may automatically lead to either favorable or unfavorable biases, such as believing that everyone on the team is very productive (positive outcome), or that everyone on the team is lazy or unproductive (negative or unfavorable outcome) (Norton Healthcare, 2023). Managers in positions of authority often implicitly look more favorably towards those candidates or employees who look like them, think like them, and talk like them, but unfavorably towards those that do not share similar characteristics (Mujtaba, 2022).

Implicit biases are often subtle and can be contradictory to our explicit values and beliefs. For instance, a person may explicitly believe that women are just as capable as men in leadership positions, but implicitly associate leadership with masculine traits. This implicit bias can influence their decisions when evaluating candidates for a leadership role. The following are examples of implicit bias that can impact a person’s decision:

1. *Gender association bias*: A manager, Shiela, implicitly associates leadership roles with masculine traits, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, and therefore may be less likely to consider female candidates for leadership positions.
2. *Racial microaggressions*: A professor, Hamid, implicitly assumes that a student of color is not a native English speaker and asks them to repeat themselves or slow down, even though they speak clearly.
3. *Ageism*: A hiring manager, Dena, implicitly assumes that older workers are less tech-savvy and less adaptable to change and therefore may be less likely to consider them for jobs that require innovative thinking or learning to use artificial intelligence tools.
4. *Disability bias*: A coworker, Alex, implicitly assumes that a colleague with a disability is less capable of performing certain tasks and offers to help them without being asked, perpetuating a stereotype.
5. *Socioeconomic bias*: A university admissions officer, William, implicitly assumes that students from lower-income backgrounds are less prepared for college-level work and may be less likely to admit them, even if they have similar qualifications as students from higher-income backgrounds.

These examples do illustrate how implicit biases can and do influence people’s attitudes, behaviors, and decisions, often without realizing it. Of course, to make fair, merit-based and reasonable decisions, one must go beyond awareness towards understanding the root causes of how such predispositions are formed and their influence on day-to-day decisions. As such, it is important to reflect on the common causes for the development of implicit bias, some of which are as follows (Mujtaba, 2022 & 2023):

1. *Socialization and cultural norms*: We often learn biases from our family, friends, and community, which can shape our attitudes and perceptions.
2. *Media representation*: The media can perpetuate stereotypes and biases, influencing our perceptions of different groups.
3. *Personal experiences*: Traumatic or negative experiences can lead to implicit biases against certain groups.
4. *Lack of exposure and familiarity*: Limited exposure to distinct groups can lead to implicit biases due to unfamiliarity.
5. *Historical and systemic inequalities*: Implicit biases can be perpetuated by historical and systemic inequalities, such as racism and sexism.
6. *Stereotypes and assumptions*: Relying on stereotypes and assumptions can lead to implicit biases, as they oversimplify complex individuals and groups.
7. *Fear and anxiety*: Fear and anxiety can contribute to implicit biases, particularly against groups perceived as threatening.

8. *Group identity and loyalty*: Strong group identities and loyalty can lead to implicit biases against outgroups.
9. *Cognitive biases and heuristics*: Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and the availability of mental shortcuts that help people make quick decisions, can contribute to implicit biases.
10. *Lack of self-awareness and reflection*: Failure to recognize and reflect on our own biases can allow implicit biases to persist and influence our behaviors.

Overall, implicit biases can be very subtle and are often in direct opposition to one’s openly expressed beliefs. While implicit biases function outside one’s conscious awareness and control, explicit biases are those personal attitudes people are consciously aware of regarding how they feel about something, and, thus, they are easier to identify.

2.3. Explicit Bias

Explicit bias refers to the conscious and intentional attitudes or stereotypes that we hold. This type of bias is often open, overt or apparent and can be reflected in our language, behavior, and decisions. Explicit bias are people’s attitudes and beliefs that they are fully aware of based on what’s being perceived and expressed. However, unconscious and implicit biases usually describe the unintended, subtle, and subconscious associations that people learn through years of socialization and experiences. Unconscious and implicit biases are those thoughts that people are unaware of on a conscious level (Harvard “Understanding Unconscious Bias, 2025). For example, a person who explicitly believes that obese applicants or a particular racial or ethnic group is inferior may discriminate against individuals from that group in hiring, promotion, or other opportunities (Sabin, Marini, & Nosek, 2012; Cavico et al., 2012; Norton Healthcare, 2023; Agerström & Rooth, 2011). The following are examples of explicit bias:

1. *Racial slurs*: A coworker, Nadim, uses racial slurs to refer to colleagues or clients of a different nationality, demonstrating a clear and intentional bias.
2. *Sexist remarks*: A manager, Sangar, makes sexist remarks about female employees, such as commenting on their appearance or assuming they are less capable than male colleagues.
3. *Religious discrimination*: A business owner, Yasmeen, explicitly states that she will not hire anyone who practices a particular religion, demonstrating a clear bias against individuals of that faith.
4. *Homophobic language*: A colleague, Samir, uses homophobic language to describe LGBTQ+ individuals, demonstrating a clear and intentional bias.
5. *Age-based exclusion*: A company, Laila-LLC., explicitly states that they only hire employees under the age of 40, demonstrating a clear bias against older workers.

Like the previous examples, these all illustrate explicit biases, which are conscious and intentional prejudices that can manifest in language, behavior, or organizational policies.

It’s worth noting that implicit and explicit biases can sometimes overlap or intersect. For instance, a person may hold explicit biases against a particular group but also have implicit biases that influence their decisions in more subtle ways. Nonetheless, such biases can heavily influence behavior and employment decisions that are unfair and/or illegal. Understanding these complexities is essential for addressing biases and promoting meritocracy in job hiring, social media, and in various industries such as healthcare as seen from the examples in Figure 1 (Raza et al., 2024).



Figure 1: Examples of Implicit and Explicit Biases.
Source: Raza et al., 2024.

It should be noted that bias is also present in text data which is commonly used in this era of digital

transformation and generative artificial intelligence. The pervasive and deeply rooted biases in data often stems from cognitive predispositions that influence people’s dialogues, views, and understanding of information (Raza et al., 2024). Deeply rooted biases can be explicit, which are often seen in discriminatory language targeting certain racial or ethnic groups in social media; but implicit bias perpetuates prejudice in subtle approaches through unintentional language use which are harmful.

“Explicit bias is a demonstration of conscious preference or aversion towards a person or group”, where “we are aware of the attitudes and beliefs we have towards others” (Nikolopoulou, 2023, para. 5). Explicit bias can be either positive or negative and it can lead to unfair treatment of others in the workplace. As explained by Nikolopoulou (2023), often expressions of explicit bias may appear innocuous, but they can be hateful speech, harassment, and/or blatantly discriminatory towards other individuals. Claiming without evidence that Turkish males are less ethically mature compared to females in Turkey might disadvantage a qualified candidate for a promotion (Mujtaba et al., 2025). Blatantly racist acts or prejudiced comments are the result of explicit bias. A teacher that praises students from a specific ethnic or socioeconomic group is an example of explicit bias, which can prevent him or her from being fair in assignment assessments. So, explicit bias usually occurs because of conscious or deliberate thoughts. As presented in Table 1, the difference between explicit and implicit bias is the concept of “conscious awareness”, since implicit biases operate outside a person’s awareness and control. Implicit bias tends to be subtle and often a direct contradiction to a person’s openly held explicit beliefs (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

Table 1.
Explicit and Implicit Biases.

Explicit bias	Implicit bias
Preferences, beliefs, and attitudes consciously expressed to friends and colleagues	Automatic associations that emerge without conscious awareness or intention
Expressed directly and deliberately	Expressed indirectly or subtly
Operates at a conscious level, in line with one’s values and worldview	Operates subconsciously, even in direct contradiction to one’s values and worldview
Examples:	Examples:
Believing female scientists who are mothers are not serious about their research.	Not hiring or promoting a female scientist who has two children and takes care of her elderly mother.
Saying older drivers get into more accidents and should not drive.	Skipping over an older candidate for a school bus driver position and hiring a younger person.
Expressing to a female colleague that you look forward to meeting her boyfriend.	Asking a female colleague if she has a fiancé, assuming heterosexuality.
Mentioning that obese people do not exercise because of laziness.	Viewing obese people or those with a legally recognized disability as lazy.
Saying that pregnant women can cost the company more money due to hospitalization.	Refusing to consider hiring or promoting a qualified pregnant employee for a position.

Source: Nikolopoulou, 2023; Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023; Norton Healthcare, 2023.

To illustrate the differences between unconscious, implicit and explicit concepts, consider the following example of having to hire someone. A manager, Dean, is evaluating candidates for a job opening. Unconsciously, Dean favors candidates who attended his alma mater (unconscious bias). Implicitly, Dean automatically or subconsciously connects leadership with masculine traits, which influences his evaluation of female candidates (implicit bias). Explicitly, Dean believes that all candidates should be evaluated based on merit, their qualifications and experience, and he makes a conscious effort to avoid discriminating against any group’s sex, skin color, disability, age, or disability (explicit bias). By recognizing and addressing these different types of biases, Dean can strive to make fairer and more informed decisions, which is a mitigation strategy to prevent unfair decisions that are very costly in lawsuit claim requiring negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and/or litigation (Mujtaba and Garner, 2022).

2.4. Gender Biases

As presented in Figure 2, implicit bias is something that people don’t even realize they have or that they are being influenced by it. An explicit bias is when a person knowingly treats someone differently due to his or her disability, weight, gender, race, etc. So, implicit bias is the brain’s automatic, instantaneous association of stereotypes and attitudes towards a particular group of people (Movement Matters, 2020; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). These implicit biases tend to be contrary to one’s consciously held personal values.

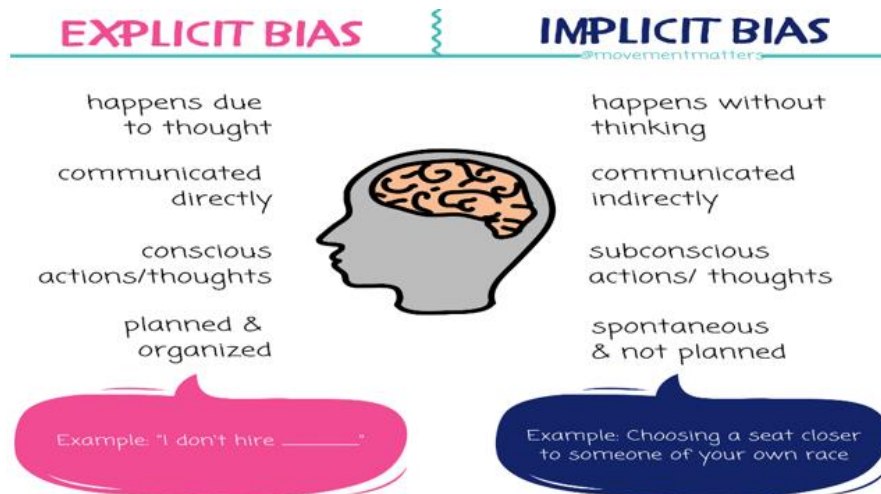


Figure 2: Implicit and Explicit Bias Differences.

Source: Movement Matters, 2020.

In a developed economy such as the United States of America, many women earn about 10–20 percent less than their male counterparts, thereby showing the existence of some explicit and implicit gender bias (Mujtaba, 2022; Shin, 2019).

In lesser developed nations such as Afghanistan, due to the existence of insecurity along with strong explicit and implicit biases, most women face severe restrictions. Regardless of the nation or economy, women, just like men, have immense potential for education, professional careers, and independence. Denying these rights not only harms women but also weakens the nation. As such, besides being a moral imperative, empowering women is essential for Afghanistan's wellbeing, economic growth, and long-term prosperity (Majboor, 2025).

Education and independence. Education is not a privilege—it is a right for all, including women. Women have the same intelligence and potential as men to become doctors, engineers, teachers, leaders, and innovators. Denying their education or the ability to work takes away the chance to contribute to their families and their country. Independence is a fundamental right for all people. Women, whether in a place like Afghanistan or the United States, should be provided with the freedom to walk freely, pursue their dreams, and make their own decisions without fear or control.

Reflecting on justice and humanity. Immanuel Kant taught that we should treat others as we would want to be treated and that every person deserves dignity and respect. Ask yourself:

1. How would you feel if you were told you could not walk outside alone to go to school, to work, to shop for groceries, or to take your child to the doctor?
2. How would you feel if you were sold into marriage, forced to share your spouse with three others, and abused or controlled every day of your life?
3. How would you feel if you were seen not as a person but as someone's property, with no voice or choice?

Men have XY chromosomes, and women have XX chromosomes; so, it is a small difference, just one letter in the genetic code, but it does not make women any less human than men (Majboor, 2025). If men were born with the XX chromosomes, they would be women and experience the same struggles that women do. The difference is so small, yet it's enough to determine how they are treated. This explanation focuses on the basic biological distinction in a straightforward manner and emphasizes that the difference is minimal, highlighting the equality between men and women. No one deserves prejudiced treatment. Women, like men, are human beings with dreams, talents, and rights. Denying these rights is not only unjust but goes against the principles of humanity and morality.

Women taking charge for a better world. Worldwide, women are stepping up and taking charge in leadership roles, bringing a fresh perspective and commitment to solving global issues. Women have the power to make better decisions that lead to win-win solutions, promoting peace and prosperity. The elimination of wasteful wars and conflicts is possible when women lead, as they tend to prioritize community, empathy, and long-term solutions over power struggles. Women's leadership is crucial for a more peaceful and equitable world.

The role reversal: empathy for women's struggles. Women give birth to and raise the very men who later abuse and restrict their rights. Ask yourself, "how would men feel if the roles were reversed?" If men were the ones denied rights, abused, and silenced by those they raised? Women, who nurture and shape the next generation, deserve to be treated with respect and fairness. Their role in society is invaluable, yet they are too often denied the ability to thrive.

A just society includes women. A society cannot claim to be just if half its population is silenced and stripped of their basic rights. Women are not property, servants, or tools. They are equal. They deserve the freedom to walk

outside, to study, to work, and to live their lives with dignity and respect. A country like of Afghanistan will more quickly grow strong when women are empowered. Treating women with fairness and dignity benefits everyone—families, communities, and the entire nation. It is time to reflect on how we treat others and ensure that all women have the opportunities they deserve to create a brighter, stronger future for all. This emphasis on women's role in leadership worldwide, their capacity to create win-win solutions, and the call for empathy by considering the reversal of roles stresses the importance of providing women with equal opportunities, which is the goal of mitigating implicit and explicit biases.

Overall, it is clear that “our early learned stereotypes often become mental tapes which can affect our feelings, thoughts and behaviors; consequently, mental tapes affect how we respond to people who are different from us” (Mujtaba, 2022, pp. 53-54). In other words, as a result of years of socialized conditioning and implicit biases, a person can be on “automatic pilot” in terms of his or her responses and behavior without considering the current facts or the individual differences regarding a person who is different. Going on automatic pilot is responding without thinking, without being conscious of why we do what we do. We make assumptions and we interact with others based on our previously learned stereotypes and ingrained implicit biases. As adults, we may still be on automatic pilot, continuing to form new mental tapes and responding inappropriately to those who are different from ourselves. As such, we must take appropriate measures to prevent biased decisions in our places of work.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a multi-faceted methodology to explore the complex issues surrounding unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias in the modern culturally diverse workplace. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine existing research and theoretical frameworks related to bias, meritocracy, and inclusion. This review included academic journals, books, and reputable online sources, providing a foundation for understanding the concepts and their implications. In addition to the literature review, the study drew on the experience and insights of professionals and experts in the field, providing valuable context and practical perspectives that can be applied in modern workforce management programs as well as in the use of technology-generated data.

Biases are not limited to human decisions as even artificial intelligence (AI) tools can produce prejudiced content either due to the GIGO (garbage in, garbage out) mindset or from hallucination. For example, AI hallucination takes place when a large language model (LLM) generates false data or output (Mujtaba, 2025). All such outputs can influence decisions, since

Bias in textual data can lead to skewed interpretations and outcomes when the data is used. These biases could perpetuate stereotypes, discrimination, or other forms of unfair treatment. An algorithm trained on biased data may end up making decisions that disproportionately impact a certain group of people. Therefore, it is crucial to detect and remove these biases to ensure the fair and ethical use of data (Raza et al., 2024).

To prevent biased decisions in the workplace and society, be they implicit or explicit, people-oriented or machine-based, expert recommendations are gleaned through personal experience and literature review. Amid all the political rhetoric and polarization in modern society, researchers and practitioners can search useful, practical perspectives and tools to manage their workforce for productivity and talent retention (Thomas, & Ely, 2020).

To further illustrate the impact of bias in the workplace, the study also examined several case studies of organizations that have implemented initiatives to address bias and promote meritocracy. These case studies provided concrete examples of strategies and interventions that have been effective in reducing bias and improving workplace culture. By combining the findings from the literature review, expert insights, and case studies, this study provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding bias in the modern workplace and offers practical recommendations for organizations seeking to promote meritocracy, impartiality, and inclusion.

4. FINDINGS

It is well established that overcoming biases is crucial in the workplace because it can lead to more informed decision-making, improved relationships, and a more inclusive work environment. Biases can result in discriminatory behaviors, unequal treatment of employees, costly lawsuits, and a lack of fairness in hiring and promotion practices. By recognizing and overcoming biases, organizations can ensure that all employees are treated fairly and have equal opportunities for growth and development. This, in turn, can lead to increased employee engagement, motivation, and productivity, ultimately benefiting the organization through sustainable performance (Vlas et al., 2022).

Overcoming biases requires a deliberate and sustained effort. It involves recognizing the biases that exist, understanding their impact, and developing strategies to mitigate them. By doing so, organizations can create a fair and inclusive work environment where all employees can thrive. This not only benefits employees but also contributes to the organization's success and reputation. As such, the following sections provide practical and

time-tested mitigation or prevention recommendations for effectively dealing with implicit, socialized unbiased decision-making processes.

4.1. Recommendations

Implicit and explicit biases in the modern workplace have significant implications for employees, organizations, shareholders, and society. Biases can affect hiring decisions, performance evaluations, promotions, and access to opportunities, leading to unfair outcomes and a lack of inclusion. This can result in a homogeneous workforce that lacks different perspectives, ideas, and experiences, ultimately hindering innovation, creativity, and business success. Moreover, biases can create a toxic work environment, leading to decreased employee engagement, motivation, and retention.

The implications of implicit and explicit biases extend beyond the workplace. Biases can perpetuate systemic inequalities and reinforce existing power dynamics, contributing to broader social and economic disparities. For instance, biases in hiring and promotion decisions can limit opportunities for underrepresented groups, perpetuating the glass ceiling and wage gaps. Furthermore, biases can also affect the way organizations interact with customers, clients, and communities, leading to missed business opportunities and reputational damage.

Ultimately, addressing implicit and explicit biases in the modern workplace is essential for creating a fair, inclusive, and merit-based work environment. Organizations must acknowledge the existence of biases and take proactive steps to mitigate their impact. This requires a commitment to meritocracy, fairness, and inclusion, as well as a willingness to challenge and change existing policies, practices, and cultural norms. By doing so, organizations can proactively tap into the different talents, perspectives, and experiences of their employees, while driving business success and contributing to a more just, merit-based, and impartial society.

Organizations can proactively prepare to defend themselves against discrimination claims using modern technologies, HR analytics and data (Nafei et al., 2025; Khanfar et al., 2024; Williams & Dolkas, 2022; Pinkett, 2023) by showing there was a non-discriminatory reason for the adverse action using the business necessity criteria (Cavico et al., 2017). For example, using the bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ) theory, organizations can demonstrate that a protected characteristic is an essential quality of the job and that discrimination against some applicants is job related (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2020).

Additionally, the following are specific recommendations to mitigate against or prevent implicit and explicit biases from negatively impacting the merit-based workforce (Minenko and Mujtaba, 2024; Mujtaba, 2023):

1. *Implement blind hiring practices:* Remove identifiable information from resumes and applications to reduce implicit bias in hiring decisions.
2. *Use objective criteria for evaluation and promotion:* Develop and use clear, job-specific criteria for evaluating employee performance and making promotion decisions.
3. *Provide regular training and education:* Offer ongoing training and education programs to raise awareness about implicit and explicit bias, and to provide strategies for overcoming bias.
4. *Create heterogeneous and inclusive interview panels:* Ensure that interview panels reflect a varied range of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.
5. *Use anonymous feedback mechanisms:* Implement anonymous feedback mechanisms to allow employees to report incidents of bias or discrimination without fear of retribution.
6. *Develop and enforce zero-tolerance policies:* Develop and enforce clear policies that prohibit discriminatory behavior and language.
7. *Increase transparency in decision-making processes:* Make decision-making processes transparent, including hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation processes.
8. *Foster an inclusive workplace culture:* Encourage an inclusive workplace culture that values and celebrates “out of the box thinking” and provides opportunities for growth to all employees.
9. *Use inclusive language:* Use inclusive language in job postings, company materials, and everyday communication to promote a welcoming culture.
10. *Establish mentorship programs:* Develop diverse mentorship programs that pair employees with mentors from different backgrounds and perspectives.
11. *Encourage periodic self-reflection:* Encourage employees and managers to engage in periodic facilitated exercises and continuous self-reflection to recognize and address their own biases.
12. *Hold leaders and managers accountable:* Hold leaders and managers accountable for promoting meritocracy, parity, and inclusion by thoroughly and professionally addressing incidents of bias and discrimination.
13. *Regularly monitor and evaluate progress:* Regularly monitor and evaluate progress towards meritocracy and inclusion goals and adjust as needed to ensure continued progress. Conduct regular audits and reviews of hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation practices to identify and address biases.

4.2. Get Off of Automatic Pilot

During one’s socialization in society, people receive lots of information and some misinformation, which tend to form their stereotypes, also known as “mental tapes,” that implicitly or subconsciously affect a person’s thinking, feeling, and behaviors (Mujtaba, 2022, p. 14). These implicit biases take place automatically and

unintentionally influencing hiring and promotional decisions, which can be a huge barrier to effective recruitment and talent retention (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023). Due to the strong influence of implicit biases, “Getting off automatic pilot is a necessity and a prerequisite for effective leadership” in any modern workplace (Mujtaba, 2022, p. 55). People-based responses should always be based on accurate data and objective information. We may not be able to completely erase negative mental tapes from the past, but we can re-record them by having new experiences with positive outcomes and making conscious decision based on facts.

There is a two-step process for overcoming implicit biases and getting off from “being on automatic pilot.” First, we need to become aware of our own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Becoming aware allows us to choose a response. So, the second step is to exercise our freedom of choice and choose our responses based on conscious thoughts rooted in evidence. We can do this by responding to differences in a logical, rational manner, and by analyzing the available facts (Mujtaba, 2022). The reality is that we are not responsible for the programming we receive as young children in society, but, as adults, we are totally responsible for changing the negative and biased thinking which influences our daily decisions. Ralph Waldo Trine, philosopher and author, once said that “There are many who are living far below their possibilities because they are continually handing over their individualities to others. If you want to be a power in the world, then be yourself.”

Table 2: Getting Off of “Auto Pilot”

Step 1	Step 2
Become aware of your own mental tapes, implicit thoughts, feelings, and behaviors towards others based on gender, age, race, etc.	Exercise your freedom of choice and choose your responses based on conscious thoughts and facts of each situation.

Source: Mujtaba, 2022, p. 55.

One suggestion for bias-free recruitment is to make the hiring strategy part of the organization’s talent management process. If managers make unbiased hiring a priority, using meritocracy or skills-based hiring criteria, they will be able to branch out the workforce and build an impartial, merit-based inclusive environment, where employees are surrounded by people who are supportive of them (Test Gorilla, 2025). Organizations should make all recruitment decisions based on data that demonstrates exactly which skills the candidates have, and how capable they are of doing the job managers need them to do.

4.3. Training on Implicit Bias

Implicit biases are deeply held thoughts that are influenced by many factors, and their awareness or acknowledgment is the first step toward the mitigation process (Marcaccio, 2020). As such, anti-bias awareness can be helpful in the creation of an inclusive workplace (Carter et al., 2020). Awareness and acknowledgement allow people to question one’s own personal implicit biases which lead to more conscious and logical thinking. Self-reflection about implicit bias can be done in facilitated workshops and tools such as the Implicit Association Bias test (Sleek, 2018). It cannot be emphasized enough that people display implicit biases through their daily actions or words in subtle ways that are not always noticeable.

For example, a manager might say to an Asian Canadian employee, “you speak English very well,” but English is their first language. These hidden insults are called microaggressions. As communications professionals we need to be aware of our microaggressions and biases, and how they may lead us to depict others less favorably or make poor decisions when it comes to developing messages (Marcaccio, 2020, para. 4).

Recruiting to build strong teams with complementary skills can lead to innovative perspectives that can lessen the use of affinity bias, or the tendency to favor those who share one’ interests, background, and experience.

One training session entitled “Implicit Bias Training,” focused on helping the audience understand the difference between explicit and implicit bias, to look at the causes of implicit bias including how they form and operate, to understand the effects of implicit bias and the harm it causes, and to develop and implement strategies to recognize, interpret, and mitigate implicit bias (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023). They offer creative intervention insights to mitigate against personal implicit biases or institutional barriers. They recommend using the acronym of “*I.M.P.L.I.C.T.*”, such as “*I*ntrospection, *M*indfulness, *P*erspective taking, *L*earn to slow down, *I*ndividuation, *C*heck Your messaging, *I*nstitutionalize fairness, and *T*ake two” to reduce bias. Overall, introspection means exploring and identifying personal prejudices through honest self-reflection on one’s own socialization, upbringing and ingrained stereotypes. Evaluating people based on their personal traits, rather than their skin color, gender or race is termed as individuation. Checking your messaging means instead of saying “we don’t see race or gender,” welcome and embrace differences of all backgrounds. “Take two” implies that resisting bias is a continuous lifelong process and we must look for new ways to improve. The following are additional insights and suggestions for mitigating against implicit bias (Haynes, Rembert and Ott, 2023):

1. Build new associations by collecting information that is contrary to cultural stereotypes that limit the negative impact of implicit bias.

2. Connect more with people of different ethnic backgrounds, generations, ages, religions, and other such traits.
3. Create a distinct and strong team to collaborate on departmental goals.
4. Identify the group or organizational blind spots and stereotypes which hinder inclusiveness.
5. Consciously focus on using non-biased interviewing and hiring policies. For example, you can avoid candidate descriptions that can trigger or reflect bias such as “very smart” or “perfect candidate”.
6. Conduct periodic audits to assess the organization’s “pulse” and employees’ level of satisfaction.
7. Train managers and leaders to be inclusionary coaches.

Changing human habits is not an easy task as can be witnessed by millions trying to lose weight, quit smoking, picking up a new hobby, etc. Changing mindset, implicit biases, and employment decisions is even more complex. Luckily, there is some evidence that implicit-bias exercises and reflections can successfully raise awareness (Test Gorilla, 2025), but there is no conclusive proof that an implicit-bias training program will prevent unconscious biases. As such, managers and HR professionals must proceed carefully to prevent audience resentment. When it comes to explicit bias training, be aware of the unintended implications since “People can experience resentment, too, and feel as though their thoughts and behavior are being controlled, or as if they’re being asked to tread on eggshells around certain people. This results in backlash, where bias increases and behavior changes for the worse” (Test Gorilla, 2025, para. 22).

Trainers must be inclusive in their facilitation process to ensure everyone is respected for their unique traits and so that the majority group is not being blamed for societal prejudices that have been in existence for centuries. The key is to let everyone self-reflect on existing societal stereotypes along with their impact on the organization, clarify the policy, expect compliance or behavior alignment with the local and national laws, and establish plans for the creation of an inclusive and meritocratic work environment for all.

5. CONCLUSION

Dealing with unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias in the modern workplace requires a multifaceted approach that involves both employees and managers making merit-based decisions. The first step is to acknowledge that favoritism exists and is pervasive, and to recognize the harm they can cause. Employees and managers must be willing to confront their own biases and take responsibility for addressing them. This can be achieved through personal reflections, workforce management development programs, team building workshops, and coaching that focus on increasing awareness and mitigation of implicit and explicit biases.

To effectively deal with predispositions, employees and managers must also develop strategies for mitigating their impact. This can include implementing blind hiring practices, using objective criteria for evaluation and promotion, and creating inclusive teams. Additionally, employees and managers must be encouraged to speak up when they witness biased behavior or language, and to report incidents of bias to HR or management. By creating a culture of accountability, meritocracy, and respect, organizations can reduce the incidence of bias and create a more inclusive workplace for all their employees, customers, and suppliers.

Ultimately, dealing with unconscious bias, implicit bias, and explicit bias in the modern workplace requires a long-term commitment to meritocracy, parity, and inclusion. It involves creating a culture that values and celebrates differences, and that provides opportunities for growth and development for all employees based on merit, hard work, motivation, and drive. By working together to address biases and promote inclusion, employees and managers can create a workplace that is fair, respectful, and productive, and that allows everyone to thrive.

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