



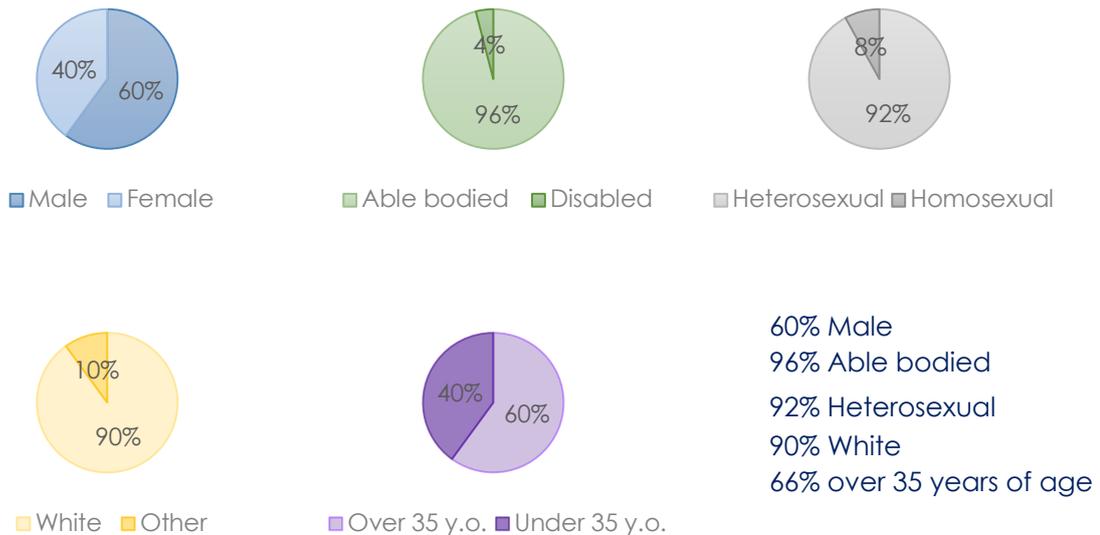
Unconscious Bias

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<https://www.fullpotentialgroup.co.uk/whitepaper/unconscious-bias/>

Beating bias to drive diversity

We will be exploring what unconscious bias is and how it can affect decision-making processes and the effectiveness of your team or organisation. It is now believed that one of the reasons we have not made greater improvements in diversity and inclusion is because of our unconscious biases. The Open Plan white paper conducted by Property Week showed that the construction industry is still a long way from being diverse.



But does it really matter? The industry has survived thus far with its current demographic, we believe it does, clients are changing and with the war for talent we need to ensure that the industry has the right people to deliver the huge increase in infrastructure that is needed.

Mckinsey's report "Why Diversity matters" highlights that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic equality are 35% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national and industry medians and companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 per cent more likely to have financial returns above. They also highlighted that in the UK for every 10% increase in gender diversity on the board that there was a 3.5% increase in EBIT.

The Reed report on gender balancing showed that in European and BRIC counties where 2 or 3 women where on the board companies were 41% ahead of the sector average in terms of return on equity and 56% in earnings before interest.

Diverse teams have been shown in several studies to deliver more innovative and creative solutions. In fact, if everyone on a team is very similar in thinking style, background and education, there is a danger that group- think will take over and that sub-optimal solutions are suggested and not challenged.

So where do our biases come from? Our brains have evolved over the millennia to help us deal with the millions of bits of data that we receive in any given moment. This was really helpful when, as cavemen, we had to make snap judgements about whether we should run away from an animal or whether we should chase it for food. Our brains developed shortcuts, one of the shortcuts that we use every day is making judgements about people; we make assumptions about their capabilities based on stereotypes that we have grown up with. However, these shortcuts in our thinking are driving our biases.



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The problem is that unconscious biases are just that, they are not in our awareness and steps need to be taken to ensure that the best team to deliver the project is created and not one that looks and sounds exactly like the project leader. It's important to understand that everyone will have biases, but we need to take steps to

understand our own and take action to mitigate them. To uncover personal biases, try these tests designed by Harvard university called Implicit Association Test -follow this link [IAT test](#).

The most obvious bias that exists in all businesses is affinity bias; this is where we like people who look and behave like ourselves. Studies show that we can often overlook people who have equally good or better skills and talents for our team, if their name does not sound British or they are a different race, gender, or age group to ourselves. A bias is a negative or positive belief about a category of people, for example "All millennials are addicted to social media", "All Baby Boomers are very loyal to their employer", "All women are going to want to have children" these statements might be true for some of the individuals in these groups but certainly not for all, and continuing to have these assumptions about people can cause us to discriminate against them.

A culture is formed by the unwritten rules of the "way things are done around here" in a team or organisation. This is usually role modelled by the most senior or powerful people in the organisation. If all of the senior team "look and sound" the same, then it can be difficult for others who "look and sound" different to fit in. The dominant group is called the In-group, the less dominant groups are called out-groups.

In-group members are often not aware of the privileges that the unspoken membership of this group gives them, they are also not aware of how it feels to be part of an out-group. For those in the out-groups, they have to be very conscious of what behaviours get rewarded and often find they have to conform and adapt to get on. Of course, by conforming they often lose sight



of their authenticity and in adapting they may lose or cover up the diverse skills and knowledge that they brought to the organisation. In Laura Liswood's book the 'Loudest Duck' she uses the analogy of In-groups being like Elephants and out-groups like mice, having to be really watchful and adaptable to avoid being trodden on.

So, in-groups benefit from practising inclusive leadership skills ensuring that everyone is encouraged to 'be themselves' at work and not having to conform to an in-group way of behaving. Culture can then be transformed to be more inclusive and accepting of difference. Bearing in mind that we all have biases, some conscious and some unconscious, how do we start to create organisations that are more accepting of difference and allow people to realise their full potential without having to conform to the cultural norms? This may seem like an impossible task, the first step is to become aware of our own biases, and then start to make conscious decisions to be more inclusive contributing to a positive revolution in the workplace. Here are some suggestions on how each of us make a difference.

- Understand your personal biases.
- Understand what assumptions and beliefs you have and then challenge them;
- Make sure that any recruitment processes are "blind" i.e. that you only see the skills, and experience on a CV before you decide to who to interview.
- Ensure that final decisions are not down to one person and that your process for measuring skills and competencies are robust.
- Seek out and work with some of the people you currently hold a bias against and get to know them with an open mind, to dispel the assumptions you might hold about them;
- Lead from the front and bring someone who is different into your team;
- Mentor, sponsor or coach someone who is different to yourself.
- Be conscious about how you lead your team, biases often play out in what is known as micro- behaviours, or micro inequities: for example, you might not really listen to someone you have a bias against, or may not give them as much time or feedback as other members of your team.
- Treating everyone equally and fairly is good leadership practice so make sure you are role modelling inclusive behaviours.
- If you notice other people in your organisation not treating someone fairly, give them feedback, they may not realise they are doing it.

Creating an Inclusive culture





Google are a good example of an organisation that are really looking at this and making great strides to be a conscious company. Details are summarised in this YouTube clip. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLjFTHTgEVU>

What they focus on:

- Ensuring that the recruitment process is fair and unbiased
- Collecting lots of data so any decision about promotion or effectiveness is really robust
- Ensuring that their environment is really inclusive
- Holding everyone to account

What needs to change in your team to increase diversity and ensure that you are giving your clients the most creative solutions?

Full Potential Group has worked with over 250,000 individuals in over 250 companies during the last 18 years, delivering business relevant, high impact coaching, team and leadership interventions. If you would like to know more about our Inclusive leadership programmes and the Full Brain Leadership model, then please get in touch.