



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Will implicit bias training work for your organization?

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Starbucks recently closed more than 8,000 company-owned stores for one day to conduct implicit bias training in response to a viral video that showed two African-American men being arrested for trespassing at one of its Philadelphia stores. Starbucks also announced that its new training curriculum, designed by several national experts, will be available to other companies for use with employees and leadership. Implicit bias training has become increasingly widespread after several highly publicized incidents of racial profiling. But is the training effective?

Implicit bias refers to the idea that people unknowingly stereotype others based on their gender, race, sexuality, or other identifiers. The concept of implicit bias arose with the popularity of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which was developed at Harvard and measures bias by having participants rapidly select associations when they're presented with a stimulus. The tool has become a popular concept in diversity and inclusion. Effective training programs can lead to an improved company culture with a more inclusive and aware workforce.

Drivers of effectiveness

Effective training looks at how people make decisions, how bias shows up in human behavior, and how to mitigate that behavior. Workplace training on implicit bias typically involves the types of biases that participants may encounter day to day through recruiting and hiring, team dynamics, and career development.

Critics of implicit bias training claim that it doesn't necessarily enhance diversity within organizations and can even condone the use of stereotypes. Participants may feel resentful about having to attend the training because they believe they are being accused of prejudice. Unfortunately, there has been little research measuring the long-term effectiveness of implicit bias training. Researchers are looking forward to exploring the effectiveness of the new Starbucks program.

Employers should approach implicit bias training with a careful communications plan and follow it up with a long-term commitment to change. If you're interested in including implicit bias training in your training curriculum, it's important to pair it with additional diversity initiatives to yield the most effective results.

Other steps to take

With or without training, you can take steps to identify unconscious bias in the workplace and to overcome it. Project Implicit through Harvard University offers the IAT free, and it can be useful in helping employees gain a better understanding of how implicit bias affects them. It's also important to review how people at your organization are hired, trained, and evaluated and how bias may enter into those processes. Finally, developing a core value system based on mutual respect for others is a foundational component of a bias-free workplace.



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