**Anti-Bias Interventions**

*Why they (need not) fail*

**Anti-bias trainings** are a billion dollar industry² & a popular response to address systemic bias issues & promote diversity, equity, & inclusion. They are easier to implement than structural change, but **are anti-bias trainings actually effective?**

### 6 Pitfalls of Anti-Bias Trainings¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pitfall</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not always conducted with organizational buy-in</td>
<td>Mandatory trainings can spark backlash³; they work best when management &amp; employees have genuine motivation to foster inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited research evaluating training effectiveness</td>
<td>Trainings are rarely subjected to peer-reviewed research aimed at improving their effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assuming the primary goal is to change BIASes</td>
<td>Changing associations can have short term effects⁷ but are difficult to change in adulthood⁸ This focus ignores many other factors affecting bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not using a clear definition of implicit bias</td>
<td>Trainings need a nuanced understanding of implicit bias &amp; how it unfolds as a reflection of broader social contexts⁴ ⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assuming awareness of implicit biases will eliminate them</td>
<td>Simply being aware of biases &amp; stereotypes does not eliminate them or lead to behavioural change⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on educating individuals, ignoring the broader context</td>
<td>Where a person works, lives, learns affects biases¹⁰ &amp; can counteract awareness efforts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research on Trainings

A rigorous study⁹ of a 1-hour educational video on implicit bias & strategies for controlling biases led to:

- **↑** acknowledgement that gender bias exists
- **↑** intention to support inclusion initiatives
- **↑** support for women

... but did not lead to behavioural change.

To address these pitfalls, we need a clearer understanding of what implicit bias is, & how to target trainings to effectively mitigate bias within organizations¹¹

### Understanding Bias

Bias is not a static trait nor always unconscious⁵; bias **unfolds as a process** in the moment

Bias often results from a motivated process¹², but is not inevitable. Stereotypes & attitudes that come to mind can be deliberately controlled¹³ ¹⁴

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¹ For more information visit: successinstem.ca

² Mental constructs that can lead people to act in ways that adversely affect targeted individuals or groups

³ Beliefs Implicit Attitudes &/or Stereotypes

⁴ Being aware of biases & stereotypes does not eliminate them or lead to behavioural change

⁵ Changing associations can have short term effects but are difficult to change in adulthood

⁶ Trainings need a nuanced understanding of implicit bias & how it unfolds as a reflection of broader social contexts

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This typology shows how in-the-moment awareness, motivation, & efforts to regulate behaviour shape the translation of individuals’ BIASes into behaviour within a given context.

Bias Typology
Expressions of BIASes in behaviour depend on 3 things:

- **Motivation**: Internal motivation to be egalitarian
- **Awareness**: Recognizing that we all have BIASes which can shape behaviour
- **Regulation**: Ability & effort to control how BIASes inform behaviour in a situation

The following flow chart demonstrates the different pathways to a variety of biases & behaviours:
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It is important to consider systemic biases when conducting anti-bias work instead of focusing on individuals. Biases & their expressions are all equally harmful, whether implicit or ambiguous. Organizations should start by identifying which type of bias or cultural norm is of concern, & create a plan, keeping the following strategies in mind:

### How This Framework Can Inform Trainings & Interventions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What to do when...</th>
<th>Bias-relevant event</th>
<th>Research supported strategies</th>
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<td><strong>In the moment...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
| Do those involved hold beliefs or implicit attitudes or stereotypes about the group? | Yes | • Remove names/gender indications of applicants while hiring\(^{18,28}\)  
• Expose staff to examples of people who contradict group stereotypes\(^{17}\)  
• A sustained commitment to recruit & retain underrepresented role models can reduced Biases\(^{29}\) |
| **Motivation** | Yes | • Frame hiring/promotion criteria to emphasize quality of ideas not leadership record\(^{30}\)  
• Recognize that merit-based practices can still be biased\(^{19}\) |
| Is the person motivated to be egalitarian? | No | • Promote benefits of diversity\(^{31,32}\) & value of multiculturalism\(^{33}\)  
• Increase intrinsic motivation by encouraging growth mindsets\(^{34}\) |
| **Awareness** | Yes | • Teach people what bias is & to identify bias when it occurs (e.g., through videos\(^{20}\) or interactive games\(^{35,36}\))  
• Communicate & model inclusive norms in the organization |
| Is the person aware of their BIAS and the harm it can do? | No | • Present bias as habit to be broken\(^{21}\) e.g., replace stereotypic thoughts with neutral ones  
• Skill training & interventions should be long-term\(^{37}\) |
| **Regulation** | Failed Regulation | • Reflecting on core values can make a person more open to finding common ground with others\(^{24,25,27}\) |
| Does the person make an effort to regulate their BIAS? | No Regulation | • Reduce threats that trigger negative reactions motivated Biases  
• Shift organizational norms towards inclusivity |
| | Up Regulation | |

Changing norms can also be done through policies & practices, & does not need buy-in from everyone in an organization.\(^{23}\) Organizations should track, communicate & assess changes in culture over time.\(^{22}\) Most effective interventions create partnerships across identity lines, with a critical mass of people in an organization working together toward the shared goal of creating an inclusive culture that fosters well being.
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References