

Unconscious Bias and Artificial Intelligence: The Impact on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the Workplace



The workshop provided practical solutions to the challenges associated with reducing unconscious bias at individual and organisation levels, and included an interactive segment where participants discussed and worked on the following statements in small groups:

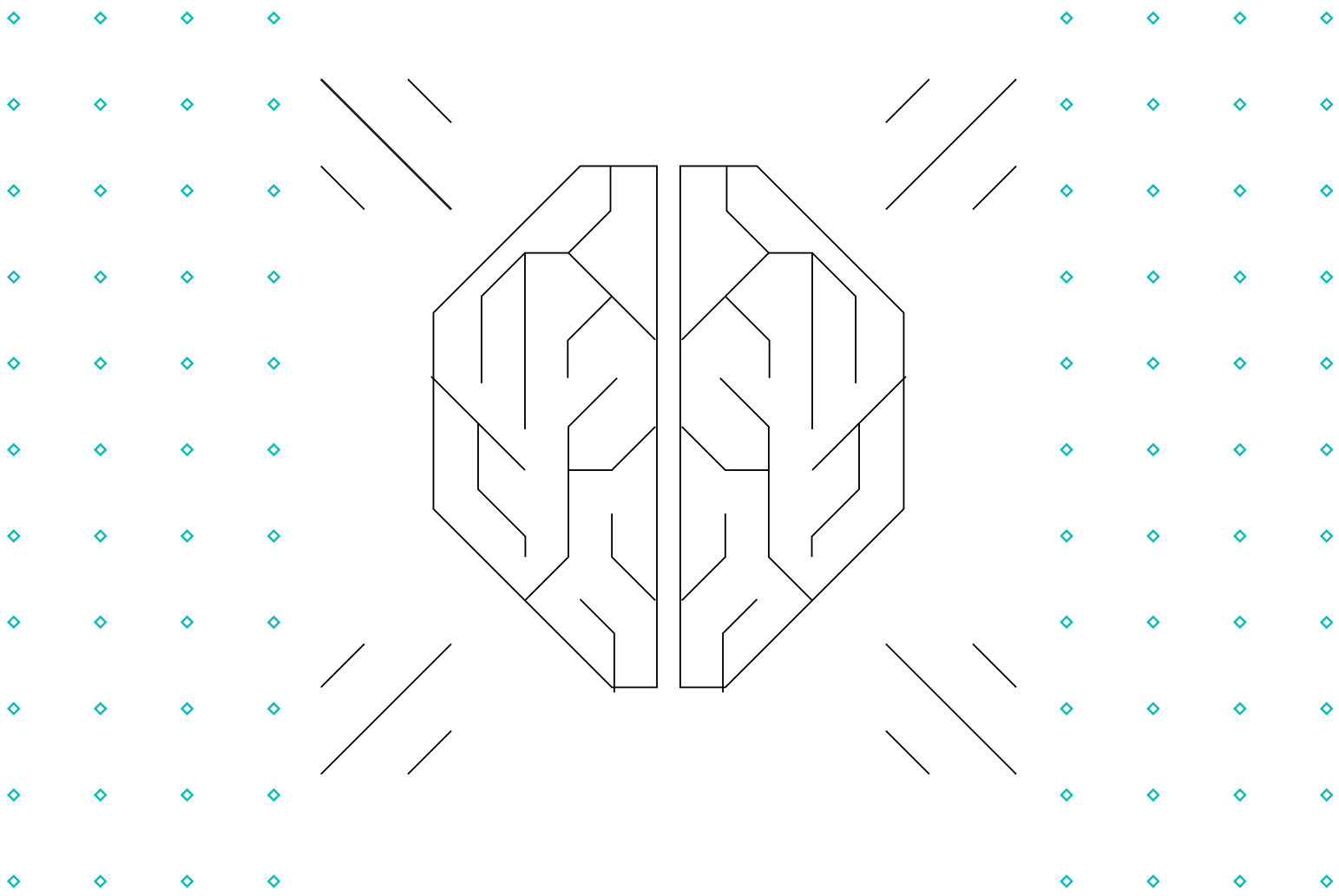
How do we address unconscious biases?

How can AI assist in addressing unconscious biases?

How can organisations reduce or mitigate unconscious biases?

Participants discussed actionable methods and strategies to mitigate unconscious biases. The discussion provided insights into how some AI tools function, the suitability of

various AI tools for business operations, and the need to account for certain biases in AI when used for making business decisions.



This report summarises the key takeaways from the workshop:



What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias refers to the human tendency to form opinions based on pre-defined beliefs, preconceived notions, past experiences, or even instinctive feelings. The panel discussed how unconscious bias manifests in different ways, with varying outcomes. Although unconscious biases are associated

with negative attitudes (e.g., introverts may be perceived as less competent than extroverts), they can also lead to positive attitudes in some cases. Ultimately, biases – whether positive or negative – often result in poor decision-making and impact our ability to engage with others effectively.

What are the different types of unconscious biases and how can these be mitigated?

People often consider gender bias to be the most prevalent form of unconscious bias. However, there are over ten different types of unconscious biases that can significantly impact workplace culture, team dynamics, and company performance. Participants discussed concrete examples of biases across a wide spectrum, including affinity bias, confirmation bias, authority bias, and conformity

bias, and how these can hinder business productivity. With this in mind, participants emphasised that the most effective way to mitigate unconscious biases is to create awareness around them. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to implement mandatory unconscious bias training programmes for all employees and create safe spaces for interaction among employees.



How does unconscious bias manifest itself in AI tools?

In today's digital age, AI is increasingly being integrated into everyday work routines, transforming various aspects of business processes and decision-making. In recruitment, AI can streamline candidate sourcing and screening, thereby reducing the time and costs associated with hiring. Performance management systems often leverage AI tools to provide real-time feedback and personalised development plans to employees, fostering a more efficient and engaged workforce. Customer service has also seen significant improvements with the adoption of AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants that provide immediate and consistent support.

Despite their remarkable potential, AI systems are not without their limitations and biases. Ultimately, AI tools reflect – and in some cases can amplify – the biases present in the data they are programmed with, as well as in the preconceived ideas of the technology leaders developing the algorithms. While AI is designed to learn, it is not able to subjectively identify differences between “good” and “bad” data. Consequently, AI is only as reliable as the data that fuels it, which is inevitably biased. For instance, it was noted that AI responses are often heavily US-centric and may lack context relevant to different geographical locations, cultures, or business practices.

Participants discussed whether AI requires regulation and how biases can be managed in a way that does not adversely affect business decisions. There was general consensus that educating employees on the proper use of AI tools is more crucial than attempting to regulate the technology itself. Training on how to input information or prompts into AI tools is becoming a critical component in preparing the future workforce. Ultimately, companies that embrace AI are likely to perform better and grow more rapidly.

This raises the question: are today's employers doing enough to reskill their workforce and prepare them for the future? While it is evident that AI systems cannot replace humans entirely, many jobs will undoubtedly evolve as companies increasingly rely on AI for certain tasks, such as creating PowerPoint presentations. Consequently, greater emphasis needs to be placed on supporting employees by providing them with the right tools, training, and opportunities to effectively integrate AI into their daily work. Additionally, businesses must establish standards and verification processes to minimise bias in AI and enhance human decision-making.

Participants then worked in small groups to address “how might we” statements and questions, resulting in the following solutions and actionable ideas:



How do we address unconscious bias?

- By sharing examples of unconscious biases.
- Through employee training and education.
- By fostering self-awareness (becoming aware of one's own thought processes).
- By creating a safe space for open discussion in the workplace and encouraging individuals to view situations from different perspectives.
- By recognising the triggers or situations that may evoke unconscious biases.

How can AI assist in addressing unconscious bias?

- By building knowledge of how AI works and understanding its limitations.
- By constantly developing the system and evolving the AI model to recognise biases.
- By ensuring a human-in-the-loop approach rather than full-automation.
- By investing in upskilling employees and raising awareness of biases in AI.
- By enhancing users' responsibility and ensuring diversity within teams, perspectives, and data.



How can organisations reduce or mitigate unconscious bias?

- By securing leadership support and ensuring a thorough understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and its connection to unconscious biases. This can be achieved by establishing a “spark board” to guide and support the C-suite in making inclusive business decisions.
- By creating accountability and improving reporting on DEI issues to highlight blind spots and biases within the organisation.
- By enhancing mindfulness and self-awareness of employees at all levels through mandatory training sessions.
- By investing in the right tools and knowledge systems to ensure DEI is integrated across all business operations.

The workshop served as an important reminder that tackling unconscious bias is essential for promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Participants acknowledged that mitigating unconscious biases requires constant self-reflection and learning at both the individual and organisation levels. As noted by Paul Hamilton, “Every bias you have, you learned. If you can learn it, you can

unlearn it.” It is now even more pressing to “unlearn” these biases, given the added complexity of AI. According to Andrea Prazakova, “Technology, including AI, does not inherently see colour, gender, or religion. The bias in AI is a reflection of human input, and it is our duty to provide it with unbiased data to evolve justly.”



¹ A spark board is a gender-balanced advisory board comprised of employees from different departments within the organisation to advise and engage with senior leadership on key business decisions and other aspects that concern employees. This can be an alternative way to ensure an inclusive and gender-sensitive decision-making process in case the board of directors is predominantly male.

Many AI tools and systems used in the workplace perpetuate patterns of unconscious bias, and employees increasingly rely on these technologies for decision-making. In this context, participants agreed that changemakers and advocates for unbiased and ethical AI models are required to drive positive change. As highlighted by Dr. Scott Nowson, "Whether it is in the development of AI

systems, or the use of them in our work and daily lives, we are all responsible for understanding the potential biases within and taking mitigating actions. This is especially true if we are using such systems with the intention of minimising our own human bias."

In light of this, it is crucial for organisations to invest in training programmes that enable employees to recognise and address their own biases, as well as any biases present in AI systems. To move in this direction, organisations might consider the following steps:

1. **Gaining a thorough understanding of how AI operates.**
2. **Analysing the data generated by AI.**
3. **Equipping the workforce to effectively integrate AI into daily operations.**

By doing so, companies can harness the benefits of AI while fostering a more diverse, inclusive, and sustainable workforce.

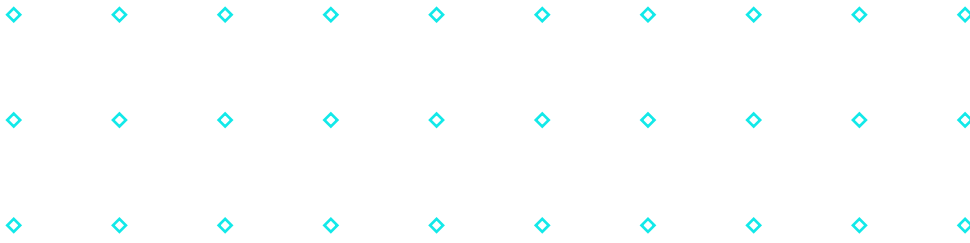
"AI is a powerful tool, but it's only as good as the data it's trained on. If that data reflects the unconscious biases that we all have, then AI can actually make those biases worse. That is why diversity in AI development is important. The more perspectives we have in the room, the better we can identify and address these issues. But it's not just about avoiding harm. AI can actually help to reduce human biases. The key is to develop AI with

ethical principles in mind. We must be accountable for what we create, explain how it works, and ensure that it is fair and does not discriminate. Privacy and data security are also extremely important. Ultimately, AI should be used to empower people, not to replace them."

Nadia Boumeziout

Head of Sustainability and Information Governance,
Zurich Insurance – Middle East





Glossary of Terms:

Affinity bias: The tendency to favour people who share similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences.

Age bias: The tendency to make judgments about individuals solely based on their age.

Appearance bias: The tendency to make judgments based on the appearance of an individual (e.g., beauty, weight, or height).

Authority bias: The tendency to place more weight on the opinion or idea of an authority figure.

Confirmation bias: The tendency to seek out and interpret new information in a way that confirms one's views or expectation.

Conformity bias: The tendency to change opinions or behaviors to match that of the bigger group, even if it does not reflect the individual's own opinions (like groupthink).

Gender bias: The tendency to associate certain stereotypes with a specific gender.

The halo effect: The tendency to develop an overall positive impression of someone because of one of their qualities or traits.

The horn effect: This is the opposite of the halo effect and refers to the tendency to have a negative impression of someone based on one trait or experience.

Illusory correlation: The tendency to associate two variables, events, or actions together even though they are unrelated to each other.

Recency bias: The tendency to attribute greater importance to recent events over past events because they are easier to remember.

