

Creating inclusion

Addressing 'unconscious bias' in organisations does not just benefit corporate diversity and inclusion goals but can also enhance safety. **ANGIE PEACOCK, Chair of global inclusion solutions specialists PDT Global, explains more.**

Post-Challenger explosion studies found that 'deviance' from the norm had become institutionalised at NASA, contributing to the safety culture behind the accident.

Without an inclusive environment, there can be no guarantee of safety.

A bold statement but one that has many layers of truth within it. Creating an inclusive environment – one where everyone with the capability to excel can do so – is something we accept as critical to future organisational success. We can hire better talent, retain a more diverse workforce, innovate better and so on. However, for many organisations, from oil to construction, from transportation to manufacturing and, not least, the global aerospace industry, there is an even more business-critical reason to do this work – and that is safety.

The business case for inclusion is strong one. The capacity for bias to unconsciously undermine inclusion and impact upon safety should not be underestimated. Bias can undermine organisational culture, affecting behaviours and decisions and, in turn, having a profound impact

on safety. Bias unconsciously influences decisions at every level through organisations and there are many examples of where such interference has been catastrophic both in terms of the decision-making process itself and the culture it is made within.

Joshua Howgego, who reported on BP's 2010 Deep Water Horizon disaster in the *New Scientist* (2015), says that rig staff had tested the concrete seal on the excavated well before removing the drilling column. The results indicated that the seal was not secure and removing the column might result in a catastrophic blowout. So why were the signs ignored? Disaster analyst Andrew Hopkins of the Australian National University in Canberra, says that workers viewed the test as a means of confirming that the well was sealed, rather than approaching it with a view to finding out whether it was sealed or not. Not only was the data review flawed by the perceived need to prove the security of the well but they dismissed compelling counter evidence. This is confirmation bias.



Case study – BAE Systems

Global Engineering Group Director, **John McCollum CEng FRAeS** discusses the unconscious bias and inclusion training journey at BAE Systems.

What is inclusion?

An inclusive environment is one where everyone with the capability can be heard and succeed.

What does inclusion mean for BAE Systems?

Throughout the Global Engineering Group, we see the direct link between the creation of an inclusive environment and the delivery of tangible business results. Partnering with PDT Global, we ensure that our leaders, engineers and specialist teams understand and embrace difference – of all kinds - to drive productivity, innovation, inclusive decision making and the creations of 'safe' psychological environments.

Why does it matter anyway?

Attracting and retaining diverse talent pools, not limited to just female engineers, ensures that BAE

Systems remains a highly desirable place to work – from our apprentices through to our most senior leaders – enabling us to attract and retain the best skills and talent and stay ahead of fierce global talent competition.

The engineering approach

Over the past two years, we've targeted groups from executive leaders to individual employees with a blended approach to unconscious bias and inclusion training that includes face to face, virtual classroom and digital microlearning. This journey has helped ingrain a deep awareness of unconscious bias and the impact that it has on all aspects of the employee lifecycle. We support our leaders with pragmatic toolsets that help us mitigate unconscious bias at its source.

Introducing a new definition of diversity has allowed us to move our people way beyond the thinking around traditional protected characteristics and given them a new lens through which to view inclusion.



Promoting inclusion – BAE Systems LGBT employees group take part in Manchester Pride in 2017.

'The rig workers' reluctance to take their test result at face value is nothing unusual. Most of us have trouble believing evidence that contradicts our preconceptions.' (Howgego)

Commercial insurers QBE's 'Issues Forum' paper on *Behavioural Safety in Construction* (2015) cites Buncefield (2005), the West Fertilizer Company (2013), The King's Cross Fire (1987), the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, the Space Shuttle *Challenger* explosion (1986), Piper Alpha (1988) and Chernobyl (1986), all as being attributable, at least in part, to flawed decisions, driven by individual perceptions. The report comments:

'When considered within the wider context of a particular culture, it becomes apparent that individuals' behaviours and the perceptions that drive those behaviours are key to determining the safety performance of an organisation.'

QBE's 'Issues Forum' recognises that underpinning behavioural safety is a belief cycle, linking beliefs, feelings, behaviours and results in a self-affirming loop. If we believe that something is lower risk than is really the case, our confidence

and bravado will drive positive behaviours that may (with a measure of good fortune) carry us through. Our perception is then reinforced and confidence increased. In reality, the fundamental belief is flawed and the risk of accident increased. So, effectively, our brains are designed to believe we make more reliable decisions than we do – and to encourage others to line up behind them.

The impact of cognitive biases can be seen far beyond the individual level where biases become embedded in organisational culture affecting the assumptions by which people operate. In each of the disastrous examples above, evidence suggests that the culture of the organisation influenced behaviours, fundamental decisions and, ultimately, safety.

The frightening thing is that often we believe we have a collaborative culture and one that carries a multitude of safety rulings – but if it is underpinned by a lack of inclusion, there will be little willingness to call out an impending disaster – or even to flag an initial error, as the fear of being an outsider can override any clear thought processes.



Paramount Pictures

Macho culture

Often the very environments where these actions take place can be labelled 'macho'. Working cultures are critical to safety. Driven by the behaviours of all leaders, they can foster a productive culture that drives the strategy – or one that does not! Truly inclusive cultures enable and engage everyone in the organisation and drive the strategy but, if the culture is undermined by bias that restricts who or what we include and how, it can severely affect safety and risk management. Robin Ely and her colleague Debra Meyerson highlighted the impact of inclusion on safety in her 15-year study on oil rigs. She identified how macho cultures exacerbated poor (often) unconscious decision-making, contributing to safety issues. Ely found that:

'Men who work in dangerous places often act invulnerable to prove their merit as workers and as men – objectives that can lead to decreased safety and efficiency. In dangerous, male-dominated work settings, men's tendency to gain respect by demonstrating and defending their masculinity is costly. Efforts to appear invulnerable block precisely the kinds of actions that encourage safety and effectiveness.'

Ely's research revealed that macho cultures place high value on the need to prove oneself and a perception that revealing one's weaknesses exposed incapability. The strong (conscious and unconscious) link between behaviours that demonstrated masculinity and capability was reinforced through hierarchical, command and control leadership. With this the culture engendered an atmosphere that stifled speaking up, the ability to question, point out flawed decision-making and, worse still, the capacity to point out hazards or accident risks. Interestingly, in our work today we are seeing that in some areas where gender issues are seen as the main tenant of diversity and inclusion agendas, the macho culture is in fact increasing.

'That's right Iceman, I AM dangerous' *Top Gun* may be cheesy 80's fiction but its storyline did include a reckless aviator and an avoidable accident.

Much of our work in this space centres on encouraging leaders to recognise their own biases and vulnerabilities. This extends to our lessening capability to judge talent in a changing world – in combination with our increasing desire to surround ourselves with 'sameness' when we feel fear – or potential fear. Affinity bias and promoting in our own image gives fuel to the macho culture as we feed a psychological need for comfort – and the repercussions can be disastrous for safety. Taking a culture of machismo and building one of openness calls upon the organisations to do many things. A mix of belief change and logical approaches are needed.

Driving the change

Initially drawing a strong line between organisational success, safety and brand and how inclusion and bias reduction drives this is key. We encourage explicit conversations through training or 'town hall' type sessions that are embedded throughout the organisation. Although 'Tone from the Top' matters – having those in the culture make these connections is a bigger driver.

Secondly, in order to change this, we need to understand what is currently there. Examining unwritten rules – the hidden norms of the team or organisation and reflecting on what these rules prevent, calling out issues, new methodologies or even actually seeing the impending disaster – is critical work. Ely talks about how creating the safe psychological space is essential. To do this the leaders have to be prepared to be vulnerable way ahead of their teams.

Uncovering the affinity bias towards masculinity is essential – disengaging the deeply held links between competency and how masculine you

BAE Systems

Fostering inclusion: BAE Systems International Women's Day event stressed the importance of networking.





BAE Systems

With aviation and aerospace facing a skills gap in engineering, a pilot shortage and increased competition from other sectors, the industry as a whole cannot ignore the need to become more inclusive.

The exclusion factor

Cultural flaws, it is argued, (Diane Vaughan 1996) heavily contributed to the NASA *Challenger* shuttle disaster. Vaughan suggests that 'deviance' from the norm had become institutionalised and highlights 'an incremental descent into poor judgement' which led to the disastrous decision to launch, concluding that 'fundamental issues pertaining to the behaviour of organisations and their environmental and cultural context, shapes the actions taken by individuals.'

Creating inclusion

The solution is to create an inclusive environment where people can be heard and individuals are

The RAeS Council and Board of Trustees have resolved to improve the Society's leadership in this area – led by a Diversity and Inclusion Working Group chaired by Past President Jenny Body. Watch for more updates on this initiative.

appear is something that can be challenged with something as simple as a cartoon drawing or short video. Having people just talk about it brings it into the one for examination and reduction.

Unconscious programming

We often speak of the 'Disney Phenomenon' where in pre-recent times we who were raised watching these cartoons had a deep unconscious programming as to what men and women did. The model of handsome/being strong/making decisions and eventually saving the situation (and often the girl) is alive and well within most post 20-year olds and contributes to this. But what of the quiet, small stature guy in the corner? The introvert who learnt long ago not to say too much or to challenge too hard, who is part of the team because of his technical excellence – and tolerated rather than included? He does not have the right image, banter or experiences to be welcomed into the club. But he may be the one with the foresight to see the red flag ahead of the situation that could damage the organisation's brand forever.

Often organisations that have a lack of inclusion also are still reliant on a hierarchical structure. This link between lack of inclusion, hierarchical cultures and safety reflects James Reason's established Swiss Cheese Model, to 'unsafe supervision', the 'preconditions for unsafe acts' and the 'unsafe acts' themselves. For example; an excluding hierarchical culture, intolerant of challenging views and where, macho behaviours are linked to high capability, will lead to 'unsafe supervision'. Leaders will consciously or unconsciously endorse the culture through comments, 'banter' and body language. They choose to listen to those who are 'in' and those who offer warnings and concerns are derided, dismissed or unheard. This creates a strong 'precondition for unsafe acts', lower assessment of risk and higher levels of risk taking, increasing the likelihood of 'unsafe acts' occurring.



enabled to excel. Kotter recommends developing a sense of urgency among large numbers of people. There has to be a widely understood personal and business case for inclusion driven by very real benefits to business strategy. Such a culture shift has to be seen to be driven from the top and authentically practiced by leaders while, at the same time, driving wider engagement and opening discussions across the organisation. Change has to start with individual recognition of our own behaviours and biases, leaders need to take responsibility for building their own and then others' awareness supporting them and enabling a safe psychological space.

We are often asked if what we are asking of our clients is to 'work with people we don't like.' Translated into this work the answer is clear. In committing to an inclusive environment where bias is reduced and difference is welcome – we have to 'learn to like more people.'

By liking we respect, trust and listen to those who are not the ones traditionally we believed would keep us safe but to those who actually will do.



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