Employment and Social Development Canada | Emploi et Développement social Canada

Canada

Exploring Unconscious Bias in Staffing
A Design Thinking Approach

Table of Contents

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What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious Bias (UB), also referred to as "implicit" or "hidden" bias, refers to situations where our background, personal experiences, perspectives, and cultural context impact our decisions, judgements and actions without our being aware of it[1]. UB occurs without one's knowledge, control, or intention, and can include attitudes, stereotypes, motivations, and assumptions[2].

Practical Tip: Understand What Biases Exist, and Which Ones You Have
HR is not exempt from bias. We are people, after all. You should start by educating yourself on the topic, what types of bias exist and how they can impact individuals and organizations (the College@ESDC offers Unconscious Bias training for employees). Then, spend some time on introspection to identify your own biases. Thinking back, what factors have influenced your interactions with others and your decision-making process? Ask for feedback from people you trust.

Working with Unconscious Bias

Why Identifying Unconscious Bias is Important
As an organization that serves and supports Canadians of all ages, socioeconomic status, and ethno-cultural and linguistic background across the country, Employment

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[1] (e.g., Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001)
[2] (Anderson et al., 2015)

and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has a responsibility to create an effective workforce that is representative and inclusive of the population's diversity. To achieve this, it strives to ensure that its staffing processes are merit-based, transparent, and fair. This can be achieved by:

- raising awareness of unconscious bias;
- proactively identifying where in the staffing process bias may occur; and,
- developing appropriate mitigation strategies to reduce or eliminate the adverse effects of unconscious bias.

There is unconscious bias in staffing. This is based on the fact that all individuals have a form of unconscious bias and since the organisational structure is developed by people, there will be a certain level of unconscious bias built into any

Where is unconscious bias (UB) in recruitment and staffing?

Everyone has unconscious bias. When it comes to UB, the question is not "Do I have unconscious bias?" but rather "What unconscious bias do I have?"

While often viewed as something unique to the individual, UB is also a broader social phenomenon. It can manifest at institutional levels within policies and practices that can make it difficult for members of certain groups to thrive and realize their full potential. At the institutional or systemic level, often due to past exclusionary traditions or lack of awareness, UB can influence the shaping of policies and practices, resulting in discriminatory practices. For example:

Situations can create a stronger potential for unconscious bias in the staffing process, including:
- high pressure staffing situations;
- influencing opinions or requirements from Senior Managers;
- lack of time to review and reflect;
- favouring candidates at the beginning of a selection process; and,
- lack of experience with diversity or lack of diversity on the selection panel.

- excluding people with different levels of disability due to the assumption that there is a cost related to accommodating them; or,
- choosing not to advertise jobs in a Region due to the belief that people from that region are unilingual.

UB can undermine the Government of Canada's fundamental goals of inclusiveness and respect for diversity.

Key Findings: Understanding and Mitigating UB

1. Simplify, clarify, and be transparent

- **Job posters** are long, vague, and filled with terminology that is only understandable to individuals who possess a frame of reference; there is an assumption applicants should understand what is being asked of them.
  Recommendation:
    - Make the job poster simple, with a clear description of the job/position (i.e. a day in the life of) and the basic requirements. This would allow candidates to better tailor their application to the job/position, minimize the misunderstandings, increase the opportunity for candidates to illustrate their relevant skills and experience and perhaps also increase the diversity of candidates who might otherwise not have applied due to not understanding what the position entails, assuming they would not be a good fit.

> **Practical Tip: *Focus On Being Proactive, Rather Than Reactive***
> All humans are subject to unconscious bias. HR personnel should remain proactive to allow reflection on their responsibilities and how they carry them out. When HR is reactive to a situation, is it very easy to let an unconscious bias slip by. We need to look deeper into situations and identify the underlying issue before unconscious assumptions take over.

- **Be clear throughout the process.** This helps candidates understand what the position is and determine if they are a good fit.
  Recommendations:
    - Tell the candidate what you are looking for, what your expectations are and what is required for the position.
    - Be clear and transparent with the candidate throughout the process about what you are asking of them and what the expectations are in terms of showcasing their abilities, what the job entails, and then ask them to show us how they meet them, or if they have any questions, concerns about the job/position.

- **Evaluating the candidate.** It is important to determine and use only what is essential to evaluate a candidate.
  Recommendations:
    - Remove additional and unnecessary information from an application. Doing so minimizes the items that create both unconscious bias and bias in general. For example, if the educational requirement is a bachelor's degree, then have the candidate confirm that they have one, but do not require them to include the institution or field of study unless relevant (the candidate will be required to provide the proof of education documents once the decision has been made). By doing this, it minimizes the potential for UB that relates to the reputation of the institution you attended, or the program you completed, automatically making you a better-skilled and talented resource.
    - A similar approach could be used with work experience; have them provide their relevant experience without the employer's name or title and, once the review of the candidate is complete, this information could be used to validate the information provided.

- **Create a Job Centre and a Review Team.** Allow more access for the candidate to communicate with a designated person to ask questions about the poster, résumé, and cover letter.
  Recommendations:
    - Training on how to apply for government positions is available to internal candidates and should also be offered to external candidates.
    - Put together a taskforce with members of different designated groups and diversity of thought, where ideas, policies, procedures, and plans could be presented, to ensure that all opinions and aspects are considered and to minimize the "in group" from being the main, if not sole, perspective in staffing.

2. Be more open. Stop looking for the prefabricated candidate

- **Make processes more open, but have universal standards for evaluation**. **Recommendations:**
    - o Make the process less rigid to allow for more openness with fewer pre-established visions of the "perfect candidate".
    - o Initiate more universal standards for evaluating candidates to remove (mis)interpretation, personal, and biased opinions.

> **Practical Tip:** *Look At How and Why Organizational Decisions Are Being Made*
> To minimize the risk of unconscious bias, we need to continually understand how and why decisions are being made by using objective criteria. We need to seek the advice and opinions from others who offer a different viewpoint to help gain a different perspective. Being around diverse teams can help us be more aware of our unconscious bias. For more information, check out: Diversity and Inclusion in the Public Service.

- **Eliminate pre-determined answers and essential keywords.** Having an expectation of certain keywords or a "perfect answer" when looking at the screening questions, résumés, cover letters, and in interviews, might eliminate promising candidates because we are looking for confirmation as opposed to listening. The terminology or "right answer" is based on a perception; what is understood as the best answer may not necessarily be the best one.
  Recommendation:
    - o Re-examine, or re-do your evaluation criteria to allow for more openness to people who are unaware of the government jargon or who may provide a different input that is equally valid and may demonstrate an ability to think outside the box.

- **Have the people who will be working with the candidate participate in the staffing process**. What is understood as being the "best candidate" for the position can be different from the viewpoint of the person managing the team versus the people working on the position or having to work with the individual. Often those involved in the selection of the candidate are looking for the "highest standard" or "best candidate" which is not always the best fit.
  Recommendation:

o   Invite members of your team to weigh-in on everything from constructing the job poster to evaluating candidates.

3.   One model doesn't fit all.

- **Explore having a diversity of application methods**. The changing global landscape and the continuous introduction of new technologies offers candidates the ability to apply in different ways. By using only one model/approach we are deciding that this is the best and only way to evaluate a candidate. This will also mean that the only people who will be successful are those that fit this model.

Recommendations:

o   Explore using different mechanisms for bringing on talent. For example,

- [Micro-missions](#) - A tool to support short-term, voluntary, and task-based opportunities for employees to contribute to work outside their normal duties and for managers to leverage talent outside their usual teams.
- [Career Marketplace](#) - An automated matching tool that quickly matches at-level mobility (i.e. micro-missions and job swapping) and development opportunities (i.e. mentoring and job shadowing) with talented employees by leveraging the content in employees' GCconnex profiles.

Practical Tip: *Ask Yourself If You're Accepting Things As 'Given' Or If You're Using the Word 'Can't'*
Unconscious bias can be tough to see because it operates in the background. You may be in the grip of an unconscious bias if you accept something as a given. You may have an unconscious bias if the word "can't" features in your inner dialogue. It often starts with "we can't" or "I can't." If you assume you have them, you'll look for

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TYPES OF **OPPORTUNITIES**
SUPPORTED ON THE CAREER MARKETPLACE

JOB SHADOWING ●
Observe an employee on the job to learn more about different careers.

JOB SHARING ●
Find an arrangement where 2 employees are working on a part-time basis to perform a full-time job.

JOB ROTATION ●
Exchange positions with 2 or more employees at equivalent levels.

ALTERNATION ●
Employees affected by a workforce reduction situation can find another unaffected employee who wishes to leave the public service.

MICRO-MISSIONS ●
Search/offer a short-term, voluntary and task-based opportunity that enables employees to contribute outside of their daily work activities.

GCconnex
(Federal public servants only)

JOB SWAP ●
Temporarily/permanently exchange positions with another employee who is at an equivalent occupational group and level.

SKILL SHARING ●●
Share knowledge, skills and experience through informal/ formal training.

PEER COACHING ●
Provide an employee with tips and advice in preparation for a specific professional challenge.

ASSIGNMENT/ SECONDMENT ●
Search/offer temporary lateral job opportunities, such as second- ments (interdepartmental) and assignments (intradepartmental).

DEPLOYMENT ●
Search/offer a permanent transfer to a position that is at the same or equivalent occupational group and level.

GCcollab
(Public servants, academics and students)

STUDENT INTEGRATION ●
Hire recently graduated post-secondary students for permanent employment in the public service.

COLLABORATION ●
Connect with people for the exchange of ideas and partnership opportunities.

CASUAL EMPLOYMENT ●
Find casual workers who can work for up to 90 working days in 1 calendar year in the same public service department or agency.

MENTORING ●●
Search/offer a personal developmental mentoring relationship.

INTERCHANGE CANADA ●
Search/offer a temporary assignment of individuals in and out of the core public administration.

Canada

- Free Agents - Canada's Free Agents is a model for talent mobility that creates space for public servants to take charge of their career. Modelled after Deloitte's "GovCloud" design this program started as a pilot to test mobility and innovation in the federal Public Service.
- Federal Internship for Newcomers Program (FIN) Program - Federal government departments and agencies can fill skilled labour shortages by hiring newcomers through the Federal Internship for Newcomers (FIN) Program. The FIN Program has pools of talented, established, and experienced professionals ready to work in fields such as administration, project management, policy analysis and research, information technology and finance, etc.

- o Explore using different approaches to interviewing and recruitment such as observation, experimentation, group evaluation, conversations, gamification, and creation. This would also include allowing the candidate to suggest their preferred method of being interviewed (presentation, brainstorm, project demo, etc.).
- o For jobs that are technical or artistic, have them complete a task relevant to their job or a desired future output. This should also be paired with a diversity of tools to assess a candidate.

> **Practical Tip:** *Listen To, Reflect Upon and Differentiate Your Current Issue*
> Whatever involves a human element of judgment is vulnerable to bias. HR professionals who are highly specialized in their functions need to guard themselves against looking for data that confirms their beliefs and refutes the rest. To sincerely understand the root cause of an issue, start by listening without bias, reflect on your assumptions, differentiate from previous experience, then proceed.

4. Use performance information (internal candidates)

- **Use Performance for Internal Candidates and Prioritize those already qualified.** Some candidates have successfully acted in a position that they then apply for but are unsuccessful in the process for that same position. This demonstrates that there is a gap between what we evaluate and what is required to be successful in the position, much of it built on assumptions and biases.
  Recommendations:
  - o Include performance in the assessment of internal candidates.

- Have a process that retains those skills on which the applicant was successful and request an update on those skills only if requirements have changed (similar to language testing).
- Connect the results of a competition to the employee development plan in order to ensure re-skilling and talent development of individuals who are already employees.
- There are also many cases in which a pool of pre-qualified candidates exists and are waiting for an opportunity, but a new process is launched. There needs to be more awareness and sharing of existing pools and fewer opportunities to justify running a new process, just because there were no questions asked about a particular skill or experience.

> **Practical Tip: *Use Technology For More Objective, Data-Driven Decisions***
> We all have biases. The key is to remove them from the workplace. Today's technology can help us take an unbiased approach to HR. By combining these advanced tools with our expertise, we can make smarter decisions, with more positive outcomes.

5. Make uncovering bias part of the process

- Create awareness and test the results.
  Recommendations:
  - Have the selection committee, prior to the process, brainstorm areas of potential bias (age, socio-economic, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, disability, personal indicators, etc.).
  - Throughout and upon completion of the process, verify the areas of bias against the results. This could be done by setting out easy-to-use guidelines, with examples, specific to the relevant portion of the hiring process, that alert HR professionals to the types of unconscious bias that they may encounter/want to watch out for.

> **Practical Tip: *Identify and Remain Accountable For Your Biases***
> We can all keep unconscious bias in check by first, identifying our unconscious bias. Second, find an accountability partner to keep bias in check. Third, make an intentional effort to check for unconscious bias, as part of the process when making decisions such as hiring.

Key Findings: Bias in the Staffing Process

<u>Unconscious bias can vary from person to person</u> and will not always be triggered in the same way.

<u>Self-reflection</u> goes a long way to mitigating UB but is not a quick and easy activity to take on, which also makes UB difficult to confront or identify.

<u>Vulnerable areas</u> are those where there is a need to interpret, assume, assess and perceive. Vulnerability is increased in stressful environments and when facing with time constraints.

Job Posters

Areas of Potential Bias
- Understanding terminology/jargon
- Word choice
- Examples provided
- Employers and titles of previous employment
- Definition of competencies (behavioural, knowledge, etc.)
- Work environment description
- Format/writing style
- Length provided versus length requested (max words)
- Asking for work experience as opposed to just experience (excludes transferable life skills)
- Job classifications (assumption people understand)
- Equity groups (perception that if you are not part of one of these groups you will not get the job)
- Insufficient explanation of expectations as to what should be included or how things should be formatted
- Proof of studies (what is acceptable)
- Conditions of employment

The job poster is biased from the start as it encompasses the expectations of which types of individuals should qualify for the job. Depending on what is included in the poster:

> **Commented [RAR1]:** In the box above, I'm not sure what is actually meant by the entry regarding length.

- **The look and feel of appealing to a specific target group** can be deemed as exclusive (for example, it could be aimed at Millennials by including trendy restaurants, gyms, outdoor activities, etc.). Individuals that might otherwise be

strong candidates may not apply if they do not match the check boxes or feel that they do not fit in or would not be part of the "club".

- **Educational requirements and/or previous experience**: There is an unconscious bias that only individuals who have a certain level of education can do a particular job, or that a specific educational requirement or institution makes you better suited for a specific job (e.g., the "Ivy League Syndrome").

- **The same poster for internal and external candidates creates a bias and assumes that all external candidates understand government process and terminology.** By default, there will be an advantage for the internal candidates who understand the inner workings of the process and language used. Individuals who do not have that frame of reference will be at a disadvantage by not understanding classifications, language levels (Bilingual EEE/EEE does not mean anything to someone outside government), trendy words (design thinking, granularity, etc.), skills and competency requirements.

Evaluating/Screening Cover Letters

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Areas of Potential Bias
- Personal indicators
- Word choice
- Language style
- Narrative
- Choice of pronoun ("I" versus "We")
- Interpretation of tone
- Length
- Details included in descriptions
- Use of keywords
- Employers and titles
- Generic versus job specific
- Amount of experience can lead to age bias
- Spelling mistakes
- Formality
- Focus of letter (achievements versus skill demonstration)
- Assumption of insight into the person
- Type of experience (work versus personal)

Candidates can be screened in or out based on the content of their cover letter. However, the expectations of what should be included in terms of length, layout, format, language, word choice, and descriptions may not be stated or explained.

People draw assumptions about a candidate based on the areas on which they focus, the examples they include, and how descriptive they are regarding their transferable experience and skills. **There may still be a focus on looking for important keywords in the letter – something not shared with the candidate and often related to government language that is considered "common speak" or even jargon.**

Many aspects of a cover letter can be perceived as indicators or places to judge an applicant and are therefore sources of unconscious bias: employers, titles, examples, verb tenses, use of "I" versus "We". **Things such as the perceived tone of a cover letter could lead to the creation of an impression that is influenced by UB, such as women who "sell themselves" on their cover letter may be read as egoistic, men who do the same read as confident.**

Applicants' cover letters may not relate directly to the job poster, especially if the job poster is vague, unclear, or uses government speak – it is not always obvious to the applicant as to how they should present themselves or answer concept-based questions (ex: are you curious? – is this positive or negative).

Evaluating/Screening Resumes

Areas of Potential Bias
- Personal indicators (address, email, employers, titles, universities, field of study, name, hobbies, duration of employment)
- Format
- Word choice
- Gaps in employment
- Key words or terminology
- Internal/external candidate
- Formality
- Spelling mistakes
- Pronoun use
- Verb tenses
- Evaluation criteria
- Expectations
- Age (based on work history and educational dates)

Candidates can be screened in or out based on their resume, and at times resumes could be used to justify an already formed opinion or find a reason to screen out the candidate because of a "gut feeling" (confirmation bias). **One of the fundamental issues that came up throughout the sessions is that the expectations and objectives of what a resume should consist of are unclear or not stipulated.** This also touches on the fact that the candidates are not aware of how their resume is being evaluated or if this is a primary component in the screening process. There is a need for more clarity in terms of layout, format, language, word choice, desired content, length, and description.

People make assumptions regarding a candidate based on the structure of their resume. For example, if the resume is not in a particular sequence, unaccounted gaps in work experience are considered bad, and contract employment might be looked down on as opposed to long-term positions. In addition, former employers, titles held in the past, and/or the absence of specific words can lead to the assumption that the candidate does not have the skills the recruiter is looking for.

Many items on a resume can be perceived as indicators (places to judge or create unfounded assumptions) which can trigger unconscious bias (such as hobbies, address, workplaces, employers, position titles, volunteer work locations/organizations, educational institutions attended, subject matter studied). An example of this would be a bias based on the language competency expectations of a person based on a last name such as "Mercier", which would be assumed a French last name, though the candidate might not speak French.

Resumes may not directly relate to the job poster, especially if the job poster is vague, unclear, or uses government speak. It is not always obvious to the applicant as to how they should present themselves or what transferable skills and experience would be relevant to the position.

Interviews

Areas of Potential Bias
- Evaluation metrics
- Understanding our assumptions of what constitutes a good answer
- Nature of questions that can be perceived as positive or negative (are you curious?)
- Physical appearance
- Style of dress
- Body language
- Accent
- Communication style
- Behaviour
- Approachability
- Interviewing without understanding the position's needs - are we looking for a team member or a superstar
- Questions left open to interpretation
- Government jargon
- Rigid interview formats are not an environment that allows candidates to demonstrate their creativity and innovation, or their ability to learn, etc.

Certain individuals will be more inclined to use certain styles of speech, vocabulary, eye contact, body language, or attitude, based on their learned experience. Behavioural and linguistic responses are reflective and influenced by cultural, economic, social, religious, and other norms. **In many cases, if a candidate is unable to meet the predefined "acceptable" or "ideal" norm, the candidate will appear less successful to an interviewer.** Examples identified include: saying "I" versus "We", not making eye contact, perception that they are not assertive hence not demonstrating leadership skills, a different sense of humour, selling themselves too strongly or not enough, assertive/aggressive language, not following the handshake protocol, not smiling, attitude and demeanour, speech patterns or accents.

The interview process should be designed to represent the type of position that is being staffed (data analyst versus labour relations advisor). A standardized process might judge individuals on criteria that are not required for their position but that recruiters "feel" are important or are comfortable with personally (i.e., a website architect does not need to have the same emotional and social skills as a labour relations advisor).

Interviewers are often trained to look for key words which may lead them to assess a candidate as successful or not based on their use or inclusion of such words. A candidate who is unaware of this expectation to use these key words, may provide the equivalent through different terms or examples, but would still be penalized for not using the exact words. Candidates from other sectors may also not know these key words or be taught that a successful candidate finds a way to paraphrase the word, as opposed to using it, and see that as a strength.

There should be openness and different expectations of what will/could occur during an interview as opposed to its being 'cookie cutter' – such as handshakes, standing up during a presentation, using key words, or answering the question based on what skills are important to the government. Questions that are open or interpretative should also not be evaluated on a pre-determined set of items that should be included in the answer, as this will eliminate diversity of thought or different forms of talent. In positions where the employer is seeking creative or innovative people, there should also be an understanding of the limitations that a candidate faces in demonstrating these abilities, given the rigid structure of the interview.

Conclusion

The exploratory study that we completed through design thinking workshops across Canada, has allowed ESDC to gather essential information to better understand some of the key areas that require attention in order to tackle Unconscious Bias in our staffing and recruitment processes. Although this study was done with the objective of identifying, minimizing and mitigating Unconscious Bias in the staffing and recruitment process, valuable information and suggestions that far exceed this scope were identified.

This research also reinforced the importance of collaboration and diversity of thought as being key components to successfully arriving at solutions. The participation of the Regions opened the space to better understand that Unconscious Bias is not only about the humans, but also about the organizations where, just like humans, no two are alike. By being able to hear the diversity of perspectives, thoughts and solutions, the exploration into Unconscious Bias became much richer in data. This gave us the opportunity, through comparative analysis, to identify the primary categories for areas of bias in staffing and recruitment, as well as obtain a variety of suggested actions, recommendations and solutions.

> **Practical Tip: *Align All Business Activities With A Strategic Intent***
> All professionals — not just HR professionals — are impacted by unconscious bias. To ensure that this bias does not impact their responsibilities at work, there should be a strong organizational framework in place so that all parts of a business are aligned with a strategic intent.

As an organization, we are strong in recognizing that jobs and people change – the nature of jobs, the workforce, and the workplace are ever transforming, which means that there is a need to reflect these changes in our recruitment and staffing. There needs to be more nimbleness in applying the expectations that we have of our employees to be agile, flexible, and innovative, to our own hiring processes. Making changes and modifications to the process should not come with the expectation that this is a revamp that will last "x" number of years, but will mean

> **Practical Tip: *Be Consistent And Analytical In Your Decision-Making Process***
> To proactively avoid unconscious bias follow best practices and apply consistent, relevant criteria to your decision-making process.

adopting a different mindset that leads us toward the understanding that we need to be ever-changing and adaptable, in order to be better positioned to get the right people into the right jobs.

The recommendations that have been put forward in this research are based on the data that was collected during the workshops, or derived from the brainstorming exercises, group discussions and solutions. No recordings were taken of the participants, which is the reason that no citations or sources have been included.

As mentioned above, unconscious bias is part of the human condition and we, as an organization, need to recognize its presence and work with the understanding that it is present. We also need to recognize that there is no single solution or mitigation strategy, but rather that it will take a diversity of actions and solutions to minimize/eliminate the negative impact of unconscious bias on ESDC's staffing and recruitment processes.

Annex 1: Our Approach – Research and Methodology

The Human Resources Services Branch (HRSB) used research previously completed by the Social Research Division, Strategic and Service Policy Branch (Literature Review and Conceptual Framework) and the Human Resources Business Innovation team at ESDC and paired it with the design thinking approach to create a day-long workshop. The objective was to bring together employees from a variety of backgrounds and positions to take on the question of Unconscious Bias in Staffing and Recruitment.

Design Thinking

Design thinking is a mindset and approach to learning, collaboration, and problem solving. In practice, the design process is a structured framework for identifying challenges, gathering information, generating potential solutions, refining ideas, and testing solutions.

Using the academic findings, together with the help of the Innovation Lab and their Behavioural Insights specialists, a series of activities were created using the design thinking approach, to move from research and theory to practical application. The intent was to stimulate change by helping participants become aware of their own unconscious bias, share it with others, and come up with solutions for change by:

- First, initiating the session with an introduction and brief overview of UB in order to ensure that participants were working with a shared understanding, definition and terminology.

- Second, reviewing current staffing processes and exercises that allowed participants to share their thoughts, identify areas, triggers, and potential sources of bias, as well as discuss their personal findings.

- And, third, participants took part in a brainstorming session at which point they were asked to ideate and trouble shoot on how to minimize bias and improve ESDC's staffing practices and processes.

The data collected was analysed through a comparative process (which compared the results for the same categories and properties across Regions) to identify the major recurring themes and findings from the design thinking sessions.

Annex 2: Participants and Locations

Participants: Directors General, Directors, Senior Managers, Project Coordinators, Senior Advisors, Recruiters, Team Leaders, Members of Operations, Analysts, etc. There was a broad range of levels participating in the sessions from a variety of departments/teams, both internal and external to ESDC.

Representation from: LGTBQ2+ people, visible minorities, Indigenous people, equal gender representation, diversity of age.

Participating Branches and Regions: ESDC – HRSB, Workplace Directorate, Workforce Strategies, Strategic and Service Policy Branch, Service Canada Branch: Citizen Service, Quebec Region, Atlantic Region, Operations Branch, Planning, Accountability and Strategic Advice Directorate, Labour Program.

Outside ESDC: Other Federal Partners (Special Advisor on Indigenous Recruitment, Canada School of the Public Service, CBSA, Public Service Commission).

Locations (date):
NCR (July 13, 2018)
Quebec (October 16, 2018)
Montreal (October 18, 2018)
Victoria (November 5, 2018)
Edmonton (November 7, 2018)
Regina (November 9, 2018)

Annex 3: Other Participants' Thoughts and Discoveries

Findings Related to Evaluations

- The parameters that we have identified and established to help us evaluate the perfect candidate have been created through the lens of a specific "in group" or the "deciding group".

- There is not always diversity on the selection panel or a representative of a designated group when a conversation is happening about their designated group. This leads to the inability of the selection panel to identify or tackle assumptions and unconscious bias that is being incorporated.

- Develop and provide individuals who are in charge of the hiring with a series of activities or exercises that allow them to develop the ability to self-reflect on their potential unconscious bias.

Findings Related to Internal Candidates

- Internal candidates will always have an advantage. The staffing process is much more accessible and clear to those who already work for the government, as they have the needed context and understanding that is essential to be successful (government jargon, criteria of evaluation, government process expectations).

- More face time equals more opportunities. People who have tasks which are at a higher profile very often get promoted faster because of more face time with upper management – they may not be the best or 'right' person for the job.

- Essential Qualifications and Required Experience, that can only be obtained when you have already reached a certain level, should not be required to get hired at that level.

Findings Related to the Process

- <u>One model favours one type of candidate</u>. We currently only use one model/approach for our staffing: pre-screening questions, resume/cover letter, interview, and selection. This model can create discrimination from the start by excluding individuals who may otherwise have the required skills, experience and talent, but are unable to meet the demands of a rigid structural approach. There is an unconscious thinking that this method provides an equal opportunity for all applicants. In addition, when a process is attempting to reach people who are innovative and creative, applicants may understand that they need to show this quality throughout the process, which is not necessarily possible since the process remains rigid.

- <u>Application method only 'online'</u> eliminates certain candidates and assumes that everyone has equal access to the internet.

- <u>Expectation that people will travel</u>. Based on the current method of application and the one model approach, there is an expectation that people will travel for the interview. This assumes that everyone has the means, time or ability to do so.

- <u>Exams or written evaluations</u> assume that everyone will be judged fairly but individuals with learning disabilities, other disabilities, or are stronger in other communication methods, will be assumed to be less able.

Annex 4: A more equitable system of evaluation

Regional Realities at ESDC
One of the important, albeit not new, insights that was strikingly evident while conducting the Design Thinking sessions, was the importance in taking the time to recognize, understand, and respect the differences between the Regions and the NCR when making decisions related to process, policies and approaches to staffing.

By assuming that staffing can be done uniformly across Canada, it diminishes our ability as an organization to identify the triggers or sources of UB, address the sources of the issues, and mitigate against their potential impact.

UB is rooted in its context and environment and its triggers are not only sourced in individuals' personal experiences, but also as a result of the environment and social surroundings in which they find themselves. For example:
for someone in a city were home ownership is uncommon there is less of a chance that they would have a bias against someone of a certain age renting an apartment, while someone in a city where the great majority of residents are homeowners may think otherwise.

By increasing the understanding and inclusion of Regional perspectives there is a greater potential to more effectively implement successful strategies, processes, and policies that are regionally, culturally, and geographically sensitive.

Considerations from a Regional Perspective - Observations and Realities

- Lacking the same diversity, or availability, of positions as the NCR, candidates may face obstacles in achieving career advancement or meeting the requirements listed in job posters (experience and or skills development) necessary to qualify for positions.

- Often the standard or evaluation metric that is used for measuring innovation and creativity is based on the NCR's initiatives or current trend. This does not take into consideration the innovation/creation that is taking place in the Regions – often, such innovation is not formal or taking place in a Lab. Standards should reflect the context, since they are not always applicable across Regions. There should be a broader understanding that Regions face different obstacles and challenges and are often required to be innovative and creative while dealing with more constraints and fewer resources.

- When running a staffing process in the Regions, there is sometimes a limited number of applicants. Having to travel for processes can also pose a challenge to some applicants.

- Language requirements should be adjusted to the reality of the Regions and the expectations of the job. Posters and requirements need to better reflect the realities, resources and access in the Regions, as well as the frequency in which languages are used.

    o UB manifests itself based on the triggers within a context. Perceptions are regional and triggers are often related to regional indicators. Therefore, UB strategies need to take the context into consideration. For example, in a primarily English-speaking Region, the expectations for a candidate to be bilingual might differ from that of a bilingual Region.

- Terminology used may also have a different association depending on the history and cultural influences of the region. For example, using the word "guru" in a job title – while this is meant to denote technical expertise, the word has different connotations and interpretations based on different cultures and religions.

Considerations from an NCR Perspective - Observations and Realities

- **There is a greater diversity of positions that candidates can apply for**. The larger issue is that there is a lot more mobility among departments and organizations, which provides employees with a much greater opportunity to gain the skills that they may need to improve in order to advance their careers.

- **Consistent application of merit may vary.** For certain job postings in the NCR, there can be an extremely high number of applications and recruiters are unable to review all of them. At this point, a certain number are discarded, and this may create a higher standard for evaluation, as opposed to the Regions where a lower number of applications may lower the standard.

- **The expectation and evaluation standards for official languages is much higher in the NCR**. There are also a lot more resources available to individuals to practice and improve their language levels.

Competencies, Skills, Content Knowledge, Academic Achievements and Experience
The evaluation, importance and weight that is currently assigned to competencies, skills, content knowledge, academic achievements and experience throughout the staffing and recruitment process was an area of concern identified by the participants. This subject came up in all the sessions, in different forms and for different reasons. The participants thought it was important that it be included in the mitigation strategy but were unsure what specific aspect was the most important. Provided below are the recommendations that were made by the participants (across Regions):

- There needs to be a clearer understanding, definition and scope for these terms;
- If we prioritize one of these terms (experience, knowledge, etc.), there needs to be a clear understanding of why, as well as a consistency in application;
- How these are measured is unclear; there is a need to develop metrics that are less susceptible to personal interpretation;
- The individuals responsible for the evaluation of these criteria should have the experience, knowledge or skills required to fairly judge the abilities of the candidate;
- The expectation of a candidate's ability should justly reflect the requirements of the position;
- The expectation of the right fit, right job should be applied to all classification and all levels.

Annex 5: Reflective Questions and Areas of Potential Further Research

Expectations about the roles and responsibilities of the recruiters

For many aspects identified as potential sources of unconscious bias in staffing, the suggested solutions revolved around awareness, understanding, and consideration about the differences existing among individuals (cultural, biological, ethnic, religious, social, economic, etc.). If recruiters were aware that a particular hand signal, use of specific words or nouns (I versus We), or eye contact style was related to culture, there may be less of a chance for a candidate to be judged unfairly, or a bias to be formed. In order to mitigate bias, it would mean that recruiters would be expected to have knowledge and awareness of all the potential cultural differences, and many participants considered this unreasonable.

Question: How do we create awareness and minimize the potential for misinterpretation without requiring recruiters to be experts in social and cultural behaviour?

Standards of evaluation, not rigid but fair.

Many participants felt that one of the ways to minimize unconscious bias was to create a more open, diversified, and accessible staffing process, from the job poster to the evaluation of the candidate. The suggestion was based on plain language, simpler applications, different interview models and styles, more candidate choice, and more freedom for the recruiters to review and discuss. Instead of imposing a strict and standardized method for assessing and evaluating the candidates, communicate what we are looking for and let the candidate choose how to demonstrate that they are a fit.

Question: What principles might guide the staffing process in order to prevent/mitigate UB?

What we know versus what we do not.

Often, employers will pick someone that they already know for a variety reasons – they may already know what that individual is capable of, and there is a higher degree of trust in someone that they know as opposed to hiring someone they do not know. By hiring someone you know, however, you may not be bringing people with new and innovative ideas into the organization.

Question: How do we create balance between the need to bring in new talent and perspectives with the importance of developing internal talent?

Unconscious Bias in nominations

In certain situations, there is no competition held for the staffing of a position – rather, it is done by nomination.

Question: How might we bring the conversation of unconscious bias into nominations?

Remedying biased decisions

Some participants in the group felt that there should be a consequence for those who continue to show bias (conscious or unconscious), but were unsure what it should be and how it would be assessed.

Question: Who becomes accountable for Unconscious Bias, does it become a criteria of performance evaluation?
Is there, or should there be, a consequence or review if bias is discovered?

Taking time to reflect and mitigate UB vs. having a more efficient staffing process

More time to reflect during hiring process is a good idea and one of the recommendations in much of the academic research (Literature Review provided to ESDC with the Conceptual Framework) when discussing strategies to minimize UB.

Question: How do we reconcile improving and speeding up the hiring process while taking into account unconscious bias, which takes time to work through? How do we balance the need to give additional time for reflection versus the importance of having a faster, more efficient process?

Annex 6: Existing Strategies

Below is a literature review of strategies and interventions to reduce unconscious bias.

Isaac et al. (2015) systematically reviewed experimental evidence for interventions mitigating gender bias in employment, which was defined as the difference in ratings or perceptions of men and women with identical qualifications. Studies confirmed negative bias against women being evaluated for positions traditionally or predominantly held by men (male sex-typed jobs), regardless of the sex of the rater. Based on their identification of the institutional interventions that had a high level of evidence for promoting gender equity in hiring, Isaac et al. developed several recommendations, including:

- **Allow applicants to provide clear evidence of job-relevant competency (for example, relevant educational or work background, high scholastic standing, job-congruent personality characteristics);**
- **Visibly display research evidence that men and women are equally successful in male sex-typed roles;**
- **Ensure that women comprise at least 25% of an applicant pool;**
- **Have raters commit to the value of credentials before seeing actual applicants;**
- **Rate specific qualifications before making summary judgments about applicants;**
- **Encourage raters to spend adequate time and avoid cognitive distractions during evaluation;**
- **Use structured rather than unstructured Interviews;**
- **Do not use "man" suffix in job titles ("chair" or "chairperson" vs. "chairman");**
- **Implement training workshops for personnel decision makers that include examples of common hiring biases and group problem solving for overcoming such biases; and**
- **Encourage raters to use an inclusion rather than an exclusion selection strategy in constructing a final list of applicants.**

Girod et al. (2016) used a standardized 20-minute educational intervention to assess medicine faculty members' perceptions of bias and their explicit and implicit attitudes toward gender and leadership. Senior Stanford School of Medicine faculty

"champions" were trained to deliver a 20-minute presentation to nearly 20% of all clinical faculty at Stanford summarizing the research literature on implicit bias. The intervention changed faculty members' perceptions of bias and had a small but positive effect on implicit bias surrounding women and leadership.

Lai et al. (2014) assessed the effectiveness of 17 interventions to reduce implicit racial preferences for light-skinned people. Effective interventions included:
- **Providing a vivid, fictional counter-stereotypic scenario (white man assaults participant while black man rescues them);**
- **Organizing a dodgeball game where the participant cooperates with black teammates and competes against white opponents who engage in unfair play;**
- **Using a hypothetical and highly threatening post-apocalyptic scenario showing pictures of black people and describing them as friends and valuable alliances and portraying white people as enemies; and**
- **Priming multiculturalism ("racial differences should be acknowledged and celebrated") instead of colour blindness ("racial categories are unimportant and should not be taken into account when crafting public policy"). Unexpectedly, they found that priming colour blindness *increased*, instead of decreasing, unconscious bias.**

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC; 2009) carried out a literature review of experimental and field studies on career-related unconscious bias in faculty and leadership recruitment. The AAMC developed several recommendations:
- **Making people aware of their own biases is the first step in mitigating the effects of unconscious bias. Therefore, ask individuals involved in hiring processes to reflect on their own unconscious bias by taking the online version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which was developed through a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, the University of Washington, Ben-Gurion University, and the University of Florida and designed to examine thoughts and feelings that exist either outside conscious awareness or outside conscious control;**
- **Create a more objective, structured interview process by (a) setting criteria or using objective measures to assess the skills needed for effective job performance; (b) administering training to all involved in**

the search and interview process on how to conduct structured
interviews; and (c) using performance, satisfaction, and turnover rates of
new hires to measure the effectiveness of the interview process;
- Be aware that recommenders of applicants may hold unconscious bias,
and therefore may present skewed representations of applicants in their
letters of recommendation;
- Consider that cultural differences can affect first impressions of
candidates. For instance, the standard interview in the United States uses
the criteria of self-confidence, goal orientation, enthusiasm, and
leadership, even though these qualities may not be apparent in people of
more reserved cultures;
- Reserve ample time for the interviews and evaluation of candidates, as
sex bias emerges more when evaluators are under time pressure.

Evan Soltas and Stephens-Davidowitz (December, 2015) analyzed minute-by-
minute Google search data and found that the prevalence of racist and hateful
searches varied with the content of the speech pronounced by former U.S. president
Barack Obama following the San Bernardino, California attack on Dec 2, 2015. During
that speech, when Obama spoke of the importance of inclusion, tolerance, and the
need to respect Muslims and fight Islamophobia, racist and hateful Google searches
about Muslims doubled. There was, however, one line in Obama's speech that was
followed by a significant and positive change in the content of search data related to
Muslims. He said: "Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbours, our co-
workers, our sports heroes and, yes, they are our men and women in uniform, who
are willing to die in defence of our country." After this line, for the first time in more
than a year, the top Googled noun after "Muslim" was not "terrorists", "extremists",
or "refugees". It was "athletes", followed by "soldiers"." And, in fact, "athletes" kept
the top spot for a full day afterwards. Google search data suggests that when we
lecture angry people, their fury can grow; when we subtly provoke people's curiosity,
giving new information, and offering new images of the group that is stoking their
rage, their thoughts are likely to take a more positive direction.

Government Initiatives

Behaghel et al. (2014) studied the impact of anonymizing resumes in the
recruiting practices of French firms. A French public employment agency offered a
program that anonymized (removed name, address, nationality, picture) the resumes

of candidates applying for firms that voluntarily registered for the program. **Anonymizing the resumes had unintended effects**. **The interview rate of candidates from minority groups *decreased* while the interview rate of candidates from majority groups increased.** Behaghel et al. provided potential explanations for the unexpected findings. First, firms that tend to treat minority candidates less favorably generally declined participation in the program, whereas firms that tend to treat them more favorably accepted it. As a result, resume anonymization prevented the selected firms from treating minority candidates more favorably during the experiment. Furthermore, interrupted labor market histories tend to be viewed negatively for candidates from majority groups but not for minority candidates. As a consequence, under anonymity, majority candidates with interrupted labor market histories were penalized less than they normally would, while minority candidates with interrupted labor market histories were penalized more.

The Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA; 2017) used a randomized controlled trial to study the impact of introducing a gender/ethnicity-blind approach to reviewing job applications for executive level positions in the Australian Public Service (APS). The results from this trial demonstrated that, on the whole, **public servants engage in positive discrimination towards female and minority candidates**. **De-identification of CVs had the effect of *decreasing* the number of female and minority candidates shortlisted for executive level APS positions.**
They concluded that across a broad range of APS agencies, introducing de-identification would have the unintended consequence of setting back efforts to promote more diversity at the senior management level in the public service. As things stand, **senior public servants appear to be promoting diversity in the way they make decisions when selecting job candidates for shortlists during the initial stage of the recruitment process. This would not be possible if applications were de-identified.**

The Eradicating Racism & Colorism from Employment (E-RACE) Initiative from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) developed best practices for employers and human resources/EEOC professionals on preventing race and colour discrimination. In the context of recruitment, hiring, and promotion, their recommendations included:
- **Analyze the duties, functions, and competencies relevant to jobs. Then create objective, job-related qualification standards related to those**

duties, functions, and competencies. Make sure they are consistently applied when choosing among candidates;

- Ensure selection criteria do not disproportionately exclude certain racial groups unless the criteria are valid predictors of successful job performance and meet the employer's business needs. For example, if educational requirements disproportionately exclude certain minority or racial groups, they may be illegal if not important for job performance or business needs;
- Make sure promotion criteria are made known, and that job openings are communicated to all eligible employees;
- When using an outside agency for recruitment, make sure the agency does not search for candidates of a particular race or colour. Both the employer that made the request, and the employment agency that honoured it would be liable.