

Unconscious Bias Training for All Staff



OVERVIEW

As part of Vancity's commitment to diversity and inclusion, the organization rolled out unconscious bias training for all staff. The training was specifically aimed at creating awareness of the presence of unconscious bias when making people and business decisions, as well as how to mitigate these biases through developing habits and shifting behaviours.

OBJECTIVES

Vancity had created a three year business plan focused on organizational and community transformation in service of our vision of redefining wealth. As part of that plan, they are aware that the organization needs to do things differently, and re-examine how team members make decisions. The decision to roll out unconscious bias training was to achieve the following objectives:

- Create awareness for all staff of how biases affect decision making
- Promote diversity of thought within the organization
- Ensure that decision making was aligned with the values of diversity and inclusion

APPROACH

To meet their objectives, Vancity took the following approach to unconscious bias training:

- Assessed organizational learning needs
- Gained full sponsorship and support from the full executive leadership team
- Selected a training vendor
- Conducted a pilot to test the proposed training
- Prepared the managers
- Trained all staff

Selection of the Training Vendor

Vancity decided to work with the NeuroLeadership Institute (NLI). This training provider was deemed as the best fit for Vancity because NLI training created an awareness of unconscious bias while making business and people decisions, as well as provided mitigation tools to overcome bias. NLI philosophy is simply "If you have a brain you have bias."

Conducted a Pilot

To check the effectiveness of the training and to receive initial feedback, Vancity rolled this out to a small introductory group chosen by Human Resources and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). From this rollout, the project team was able to gather initial data and feedback so minor amendments could be made before rolling it out to the wider organization.

Prepared the Managers

The Vancity training team held one hour kick off meetings for all managers. The meetings focused on what unconscious bias is, what it means to the organization, and how it fits into the overall company's plan. The calls were recorded for those that missed it. It was reinforced to managers that they are not expected to be experts, but rather that they are on this journey with their team members; this concept represents a culture shift for Vancity.

Trained All Staff

After the managers were prepared, the training went live for all staff to participate. The training consisted of bite sized learning where learners watched a 5 minute video over three weeks with some research summary and tools to support their learning. In addition to this, an internal web site was created as an Unconscious Bias resource centre; this resource centre hosted a variety of tools including a facilitator discussion guide, customized Vancity scenarios to practice accepting, labelling and mitigating bias, FAQ's and videos, books, and internal social media outlets, as well as in person lunch and learns.

Communication is Key

A communication plan to support the roll out is key to ensuring that employees are aware of what is happening and why. Vancity communicated early and often, provided an internal email and offered support to both managers and employees. Executive leaders and middle managers were brought along on the communication journey to prepare them for what to expect and act as ambassadors to their business areas. Internal communication also included articles, and videos from executive leaders showcasing their support and sponsorship to this learning.

Throughout the communication it was important to highlight the "WIIFM" What's in it for me - to understand the importance of the training outcomes to their role and the organization.

OUTCOMES

Over 93% of employees participated in the training, which is an outstanding success rate.

Recent survey results from the unconscious bias training indicated a positive shift in mindset and behaviors towards mitigating bias. The survey also indicated strong personal commitments to applying the learnings.

- A subtle shift in the organization's mindset based on greater self-awareness, empathy, curiosity, understanding, and acceptance of diversity and diverse experiences.

- Employees see the opportunity to create broader impact in the community.
- Colleagues are pointing out where they see bias occurring in their team practices. This indicates employees have the courage to challenge each other in a healthy way and reinforce the mitigating tools and learnings.
- Unconscious bias training has had a positive influence on personal and professional lives, which sets the foundation for embedding the learnings and creating long-term sustainment.
- Employees see the opportunity to create a broader impact in community.

LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout this process, Vancity learned a great deal. Their key lessons learned are below:

Timing is Everything

Timing for unconscious bias was key to the organization's success by ensuring the training fit within the wider themes and strategic direction of the organization. This enabled Vancity employees to better understand how the training relates to their strategic 2020 business plan, and role in it.

Choose the Right Team

In order to have a strong roll out, Vancity felt that having the right team in place was critical. The learning and development team lead this project as they had a strong overview of organization wide initiatives and how unconscious bias was able to be embedded. The learning and development team understood the key objectives of the training, as well as apply the key learning principles to make this successful.

NEXT STEPS

Vancity knows that delivering the training is one part of the journey. One of the key next steps is to solidify how they plan to sustain the momentum that has resulted from the training. The learning and development team at Vancity is putting together a sustainment plan that involves embedding unconscious bias into other areas of the organizations learning. For example: embedding bias mitigation into recruitment practices, eliminating bias into our internal policies and procedures, mitigating bias when offering credit to our retail and business members. Further sustainment plans are being reviewed.