MERCER WEBCAST

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND GLOBAL MOBILITY:
THE IMPACT ON CANDIDATE SELECTION, MANAGEMENT
AND PROGRAMME PERCEPTION

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Kate Fitzpatrick and David Deegan
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Today’s Speakers

KATE FITZPATRICK  
Principal – Senior Mobility Consultant  
kate.fitzpatrick@mercer.com  
+44 (0)20 7178 5653

DAVID DEEGAN  
Principal – Leadership and Organisational Performance  
david.deegan@mercer.com  
+44 (0)791 777 8106
Agenda
What we’ll cover today

• Unconscious bias: what is it, why does it happen, and why address it?

• The impact of unconscious bias on global mobility: how does it manifest itself?
  - Candidate identification and selection.
  - On-going performance management and development.
  - Repatriation and redeployment planning.
  - Post-assignment staff retention.
  - Programme perception.

• Hints and tips for identifying and challenging unconscious bias in your global mobility programme and organisation.
Section 1
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS:
WHAT IS IT, WHY DOES IT HAPPEN, AND WHY ADDRESS IT?
What is Unconscious Bias anyway?

“A great many people think they are thinking, when they are actually merely re-arranging their prejudices.”

(William James)
Why does Unconscious Bias happen?
Forging social identities

**STEP 1**
Categorisation of ourselves and others

**STEP 2**
Identification with our group

**STEP 3**
Comparison of our group with other groups
Why does Unconscious Bias happen?  
Forging social identities

**IN-GROUP**
- Members seen as individuals
- Difference is accepted
- Positive information is remembered
- Greater recall of contributions
- Works hard for in-group
- Prepared to make sacrifices for in-group
- Invokes feelings of:
  - Trust
  - Worth
  - Self-esteem
  - Security

**OUT-GROUP**
- Seen as homogeneous
- Differences minimised
- Less positive information recalled
- More likely to forget contribution
- Will not put in so much effort
- Less prepared to offer support
- Invokes feelings of:
  - Anxiety
  - Distrust
  - Unfamiliarity
  - Hostility

Why does Unconscious Bias happen? The creation of “Absolute Truths”
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Why does Unconscious Bias happen? The creation of “Absolute Truths”
Why address Unconscious Bias in your organisation?

The business case for diversity, and therefore the case for tackling unconscious bias, typically includes the following drivers:

- Legislative framework
- Demography of available workforce
- Demography of customers
- Creativity within teams
- Recruitment and selection
- Talent management
- Retention
- Flexible working
- Brand reputation
Section 2

THE IMPACT OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS ON GLOBAL MOBILITY: HOW DOES IT MANIFEST ITSELF?
1. Candidate identification and selection

We need to send Steve to Shanghai to take charge of this project – he’s definitely the best man for the job.

Jessica is well-qualified for the role, but I don’t think the team in Abu Dhabi will respond well to having a female manager.

Clare is a high potential talent in the team, and she needs the international experience to progress, but she has a young family so won’t want to go on assignment right now.

Juan wants to take an assignment to further his career, but the only opening we have right now is in Moscow, and I’m not sure we can send him there as an openly gay guy.
2. Performance management and career development on assignment

Brigit speaks the local language so was supposed to fit in easily and get the job done quicker, but this hasn’t happened, so she’s underperforming.

I know Daniel is doing well abroad, but we can’t promote someone who isn’t here.

Mary doesn’t have the same education qualifications as her peer group over here, so we can’t rate her as highly as those with the post-graduate degrees.

Antonio’s feedback from his host-line manager isn’t as positive as it usually is, but he has always been a high achiever so we should still give him an ‘above average’ performance rating.
3. Repatriation or redeployment planning

Jackie won’t want to take a sequential assignment – she said at the beginning she would only go for a year because her partner had to stay at home for work.

People who go on assignment from less developed countries never want to come home.

Returning expatriates always want to come home to something more exciting or challenging.
4. Post-assignment staff retention

Who does Rob think he is, coming back here and telling everyone how to do things differently?

I don’t know why I bothered coming back – no one values the experience I got on my assignment.

I know Nina got promoted in the host country in her second year on assignment, but we need to see what she can do now that she’s home, so let’s bring her back at the bottom of the salary band for her new grade.

Having been to New York City, Craig is going to find his home town pretty dull – I’ll put money on him moving to London within the year.
5. Programme perception

People who go on assignment are ‘out of sight, out of mind’.

People who go on assignment get promoted more quickly.

People who go on assignment must be high potential. I’m not on that leadership development programme, so I’ll never get the chance to go or progress like those people.

The global mobility programme is a way of moving problem employees on to a different place. No one will send their high performers, they are too valuable to lose.

People who go on assignment are financially better off.
The impact of Unconscious Bias on global mobility

The impact of unchecked unconscious bias on your global mobility programme and organisation as a whole can include:

- Limited talent pipelines (pre-selection bias)
- Lack of diversity in teams
- Lack of diversity and experience in future leadership candidates
- Brand reputation and organisational culture (internal and external)
- Retention issues
Section 3

CHALLENGING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN YOUR GLOBAL MOBILITY PROGRAMME: CHANGING THE CONVERSATION
Statistics don’t change people’s minds

- Statistics demonstrate a situation but they do not explain the reason.
- We tend to ascribe reasons to the statistics we see without questioning what is behind them. Statistics can therefore perpetuate views.
- People will use statistics to reinforce own view; rarely do they change views on their own.
Hints and tips for encouraging sharing of information

- Tell people why the information would be useful – i.e. because it will help you support them better.
- Tell them it will be kept confidential unless they want you to share something.
- Take action with any information that is shared with you at that point – i.e. demonstrate your genuine intent to support the person.
- Tell people that they do not have to tell you anything now; only when they feel it is appropriate.
Hints and tips for inclusive leadership

- If someone says something stereotypical, then before “evaluating” an individual make a point of thinking what are the alternative “stories” of why a reasonable, rational human being would say that.

- If someone says something stereotypical that annoys you, invite them to say more. Keep the conversation going by using “and” instead of “but”.

- Demonstrate that you are broadening your in-group. Proactively get involved in new conversations.

- Encourage people who have “broken the mold” to be role models.

- Use some of the models and theories in your conversations to help people understand that unconscious bias is a reality, a normality, and is something we can address.
1. Candidate identification and selection – operational interventions

- Ensure role specifications and team structures are in place to objectively assess all candidates.
- Advertise all assignments on internal recruitment websites, or at least within relevant departments.
- Conduct formal skill and competency based interviews.
- Include cross-cultural assessment in your selection processes.
- Provide cross-cultural awareness training for hiring managers, and in teams where required.
- Deliver Unconscious Bias training to hiring managers on a global basis.
- Promote company Diversity and Inclusiveness policies in all geographies where possible.
- Encourage individuals to share their mobility aspirations and personal circumstances that might positively or negatively impact their ability to be internationally mobile at particular points in their career or personal life.
We need to send Steve to Shanghai to take charge of this project – he’s definitely the best man for the job.

Jessica is well-qualified for the role, but I don’t think the team in Abu Dhabi will respond well to having a female manager.

- Have other candidates been objectively considered?
- Why does Steve specifically need to be the one to take charge?
- Why do you think there needs to be a man in this role?
- Is Steve suited to the challenges of working in a cross-cultural environment?
- Is there someone local in Shanghai who can take this project on? If not, why not?

- How do you know the team in Abu Dhabi won’t respond well to a female manager?
- Tell me what you know about Arab or Emirati culture.
- What is the demographic of the host country team anyway?
- Does Jessica have a flexible management style that can respond to a different team dynamic?
- Do you know about our company Diversity and Inclusion policies that could support this appointment?
1. Candidate identification and selection – changing the conversation

Clare is a high potential talent in the team, and she needs the international experience to progress, but she has a young family so won’t want to go on assignment right now.

Juan wants to take an assignment to further his career, but the only opening we have right now is in Moscow, and I’m not sure we can send him there as an openly gay guy.

• Is Clare aware of the international assignment opportunity?
• What do you know about our assignment policies and the family support assistance we provide to our employees?
• If Clare isn’t able to take the assignment at this time, what other options are available to enable her to get the international experience she needs to move to the next level? e.g. Can we re-define her role to include cross-border responsibilities?

• Are all parties aware of the current legal and social impact an assignment to Moscow would have?
• What other destinations are likely to have openings in the next six months?
• How might Juan get the experience he is looking for in another way in the short term?
• Are our mobility policies clear about how we can support Juan and his partner/spouse/family, if appropriate?
• What do you know about our global Diversity and Inclusiveness policies?
2. Performance management and career development on assignment – operational interventions

• Ensure role specifications and team structures are in place to objectively assess performance against expectations.

• Require formal 360-degree feedback on all assignees to be collated and shared with home and host line management on a regular basis in line with company review cycles, and more frequently if required.

• Appoint a home and host career counsellor with formal responsibilities with regard to the performance management and career development of the assignee.

• Review feedback for evidence of unconscious bias (positive and negative) as part of a moderation process.

• Ensure promotion business cases are transparent, objective, and well-documented.

• Document clear and achievable development goals for assignees while on international assignment.

• Encourage individuals to speak candidly of their experiences while on assignment, and to seek additional support early so any issues can be addressed as soon as possible.
2. Performance management and career development on assignment – changing the conversation

Brigit speaks the local language so was supposed to fit in easily and get the job done quicker, but this hasn’t happened, so she’s underperforming.

I know Daniel is doing well abroad, but we can’t promote someone who isn’t here.

- What other factors do you think might be in play that could be impacting either the project or Brigit’s performance?
- What kind of formal feedback mechanisms are in place?
- Has anyone discussed Brigit’s performance with her to date and what were the outcomes?
- How might Brigit’s ‘outsider’ status be impacting her ability to perform in her new team?

- Why can’t you promote someone who is not here?
- What does the formal written feedback tell us about Daniel’s performance this year?
- Does his host country line manager think he is ready for promotion?
- What are the key skills needed at the next level? Does the feedback suggest that Daniel is operating at that level already?
- What potential does Daniel have to progress further?
2. Performance management and career development on assignment – changing the conversation

Mary doesn’t have the same education qualifications as her peer group over here, so we can’t rate her as highly as those with the post-graduate degrees.

Antonio’s feedback from his host line manager isn’t as positive as it usually is, but he has always been a high achiever so we should still give him an ‘above average’ performance rating.

- Has Mary got the baseline qualifications and experience required for the role?
- Mary has more experience than some of the more highly qualified members of the team – how does that factor in this discussion?
- Have you seen the formal written feedback about Mary’s performance this year? How does it compare with her peers in terms of pure performance?
- In what ways was the feedback different than in prior review periods?
- In comparison to his home-country peers, and based on the feedback from the host location, how would you rate him?
3. Repatriation or redeployment planning – operational interventions

- Ensure effective repatriation/redeployment planning strategies are in place (e.g. links to Resourcing managers to identify prospective roles well in advance of repatriation; challenge unconscious bias in the next candidate selection phase).

- Conduct pre-repatriation consultations with assignees to determine their current preferences for their next role and location.

- Consider the practicalities of a localisation or sequential assignment (e.g. immigration requirements and impact on compliance/benefits).

- Encouraging individuals to share their preferences in advance so as to avoid assumptions being made by those responsible for repatriation or redeployment planning.
3. Repatriation or redeployment planning – changing the conversation

Jackie won’t want to take a sequential assignment – she said at the beginning she would only go for a year because her partner had to stay at home for work.

People who go on assignment from less developed countries never want to come home.

- How well has Jackie performed on her current assignment?
- What is the role you have in mind for her, and how does this relate to her stated career objectives?
- Have you spoken with her recently about her current career objectives? Have they changed since the commencement of her assignment?
- If Jackie does want to repatriate as originally planned, what are her options?

- Tell me more about the evidence on which you are basing that statement.
- What opportunities exist in the home business which would make best use of the skills acquired on assignment?
- If an assignee wants to localise in the host location, have you explored whether this is possible?
3. Repatriation or redeployment planning – changing the conversation

Returning expatriates always want to come home to something more exciting or challenging.

- Have you discussed with the repatriating assignee as to what sort of role they might be looking for on return home?
- What opportunities exist in the home business which would make best use of the skills acquired on assignment?
4. Post-assignment staff retention – operational interventions

- Conduct post-assignment briefings with assignees to help manage their reintegration, and encourage line management to do the same.

- Encourage knowledge transfer sessions with returned assignees and members of the home team.

- Ensure salary and benefit packages on repatriation are fair and equitable within peer groups within your current reward structure.

- Encourage individuals to be role models for other potential candidates.
4. Post-assignment staff retention – changing the conversation

Who does Rob think he is, coming back here and telling everyone how to do things differently?

I don’t know why I bothered coming back – no one values the experience I got on my assignment.

- What new ideas has Rob brought back to the team?
- Where do you think they could add value?
- Is the team aware of the successful projects Rob was involved with while he was abroad?
- Has Rob been briefed on the achievements of the team in his absence?

- What experiences did you have abroad that you think would have the best impact on the team/project now you’re back? Why?
- Have you spoken to your manager about your ideas? If not, why not?
- If you could pick one person in the team who you think would appreciate one of your experiences, who would that be, and why?
4. Post-assignment staff retention – changing the conversation

I know Nina got promoted in the host country in her second year on assignment, but we need to see what she can do now that she’s home, so let’s bring her back at the bottom of the salary band for her new grade.

Having been to New York City, Craig is going to find his home town pretty dull – I’ll put money on him moving to London within the year.

- Have you seen the feedback and promotion business case for Nina’s promotion in the host country? What about the feedback from her last 12 months on assignment?
- Based on that information, how does she compare with someone promoted at the same time here?
- If you had to hire Nina externally, would you still start her at the bottom of the pay grade?

- Why do you think our home town is dull in comparison to New York City?
- What has Craig shared with you about his plans now that he is back home?
5. Programme perception – operational interventions

- Ensure assignees are allocated a home and host line manager and/or mentor, with clear responsibilities with regard to the performance and career management of the assignee throughout the course of the assignment and beyond.

- Leave outbound assignees on home country headcount for future budgeting and performance monitoring purposes, even if they are being paid abroad.

- Include outbound and inbound assignees on your talent management lists, and proactively track their progress.

- Develop a global mobility policy suite which caters for different assignment drivers and circumstances, to maximise inclusivity.

- Conduct assignee and stakeholder surveys to understand how your mobility programme is perceived, and act on the responses.

- Communicate, communicate, communicate!
People who go on assignment are ‘out of sight, out of mind’.

People who go on assignment get promoted more quickly.

- What’s happened that makes you say that?
- How do you keep track of people who have gone on assignment yourself?
- What gets in the way of you keeping track of your assignees?
- What could you do to keep the outbound assignees in your team aware of what’s going on here at home?

- What examples do you have that makes you say that?
- Tell me more about what you mean by ‘quickly’? i.e. I’m keen to understand the speed at which you think we should be promoting people?
- What do you feel are the criteria that would lead to someone being promoted more quickly than someone else?
- How can we use those criteria to measure people both on assignment and at home?
People who go on assignment must be high potential. I’m not on that leadership development programme, so I’ll never get the chance to go or progress like those people.

The global mobility programme is a way of moving problem employees on to a different place. No one will send their high performers, they are too valuable to lose.

- Have you had a look at our global mobility policies? There are different policies for different business drivers, not just the people on the leadership programme.
- Whom do you know that has been on an assignment with the company?
- What do you think are the qualities of a successful international assignee?
- Have you seen the selection criteria for the different assignment types we have?
- Who do you know who has been turned down for an international assignment, and what do you believe were the reasons?
- What are the benefits to the business for sending high performers on assignment?
- What are the pitfalls of the business sending ‘problem’ employees on assignment?
- If what you’re seeing is true, then what do we need to do differently as an organisation to get the right people in the right places, and performing well?
5. Programme perception – changing the conversation

- Tell me what you know about our international assignment policies and the benefits included.
- How should we be incentivising people to go on international assignment?
- How should we be supporting our employees and their families when they are out on international assignment?
- If you were asked to go on an assignment, what would incentivise you other than financial reward?

People who go on assignment are financially better off.
Section 4
SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS
Successful Inclusive and Strategic HR Collaboration

**TALENT MANAGEMENT:**
Ongoing, inclusive and candid dialog about skills and aspirations, and ensuring effective resource planning and succession management in an international context.

**RESOURCING:**
Structured, objective recruitment processes and selection techniques to ensure the right people are selected for international development.

**GLOBAL MOBILITY:**
Facilitation of strategic, inclusive and compliant deployment of expatriate staff, enabling development in line with business strategy.

**TOTAL REWARD:**
An integrated, aligned reward strategy which both differentiates and segments whilst taking account of employee choices.

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:**
The core business process for communicating expectations, assessing performance and moderating peer groups in a way that takes account of differences at an individual level.
Reflective take-away questions

From what we’ve discussed today:

• How will you test your own assumptive thinking?

• What generalising statements have you heard that might indicate that unconscious bias is at play in your team?

• What workforce demographic data could you gather to see where unconscious bias is happening in your mobility programme or beyond?

• Which of the models, hints, or example questions outlined in today’s webcast could you use to drive constructive conversations about unconscious bias in your organisation?
Questions

KATE FITZPATRICK
Principal – Senior Mobility Consultant
kate.fitzpatrick@mercer.com
+44 (0)20 7178 5653

DAVID DEEGAN
Principal – Leadership Development
david.deegan@mercer.com
+44 (0)791 777 8106

QUESTIONS
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