

Managing unconscious bias and microaggression in hybrid and remote work

Information on the case study

Organisation: Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd.

Size: 250 employees

Location: Greece

Sector: Sustainable Fashion

Operational context

Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. is a leading company in Greece's sustainable fashion industry. The company produces eco-friendly clothing and accessories, emphasising ethical sourcing and sustainable practices. The workforce comprises designers, marketers, administrative staff, and factory workers. The recent shift to a hybrid work model, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, combined remote work for corporate staff with on-site work for factory employees.

The Problem/opportunity

Problem: The transition to a hybrid work model revealed underlying issues of unconscious bias and microaggressions within the organisation. Remote employees, especially those from minority backgrounds, reported feeling marginalised during virtual meetings and excluded from critical decision-making processes. Microaggressions in virtual communication, such as dismissive comments and inappropriate jokes, also became more apparent.

Opportunity: This situation presented an opportunity for Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. to address these issues proactively, promoting a more inclusive and respectful work environment. The company's leadership recognised that effectively managing unconscious bias and microaggression could enhance employee engagement, foster innovation, and improve overall productivity.

What was done

1. Conducting a thorough assessment:

- **Action:** Partnered with external consultants specialising in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to comprehensively assess the company's current practices.
- **Example:** Surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with employees to identify unconscious bias and microaggressions.

2. Implementing training programs:

- **Action:** Rolled out mandatory training programs to recognise and address unconscious bias and microaggressions.
- **Example:** Interactive workshops and e-learning modules were developed to educate employees about the impact of their behaviour and how to foster an inclusive environment.

3. Establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms:

- **Action:** Updated the company's code of conduct to include specific guidelines on preventing and addressing microaggressions and unconscious bias.
- **Example:** Implemented anonymous reporting tools and established a DEI committee to handle complaints and ensure accountability.

4. Promoting inclusive communication:

- **Action:** Developed guidelines for inclusive communication in virtual settings, emphasising active listening, equitable participation, and respectful language.
- **Example:** Encouraged the use of inclusive language in emails and virtual meetings and provided training on how to facilitate inclusive discussions.

5. Enhancing leadership accountability:

- **Action:** Incorporated DEI objectives into performance evaluations for managers and leaders.
- **Example:** Leaders were trained to recognise their biases and were held accountable for fostering inclusive team environments.

6. Creating support networks:

- **Action:** Established Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to support and advocate for underrepresented employees.
- **Example:** Launched ERGs for women, LGBTQ+ employees, and ethnic minorities, facilitating regular meetings and providing a platform for shared experiences.

Outcomes

1. Increased awareness and understanding:

- **Outcome:** Employees became more aware of their biases and the impact of their actions on others. Training programs led to a greater understanding of recognising and mitigating unconscious bias and microaggressions.
 - **Evidence:** Post-training surveys indicated a 75% increase in employee awareness and understanding of DEI issues.
2. **Improved reporting and accountability:**
- **Outcome:** Establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms resulted in more employees feeling safe reporting instances of bias and microaggression.
 - **Evidence:** The number of reported incidents increased initially, indicating greater trust in the reporting process, followed by a decrease as the culture improved.
3. **Enhanced employee engagement and inclusion:**
- **Outcome:** Promoting inclusive communication and establishing ERGs helped create a more engaged and inclusive work environment.
 - **Evidence:** Employee engagement scores in annual surveys improved by 20%, with specific gains in the feeling of inclusion and belonging.
4. **Stronger leadership commitment:**
- **Outcome:** Leaders became more committed to DEI objectives, resulting in more inclusive team management and decision-making processes.
 - **Evidence:** Performance reviews significantly improved leaders' DEI competencies, and employee feedback highlighted more inclusive leadership practices.
5. **Positive impact on company culture:**
- **Outcome:** The comprehensive approach to managing unconscious bias and microaggressions fostered a more respectful and supportive company culture.
 - **Evidence:** Employee retention rates improved by 15%, and there was a noticeable increase in the diversity of new hires, reflecting a more inclusive recruiting process.

Conclusion

By taking targeted actions to address unconscious bias and microaggressions, Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. not only improved its workplace culture but also set a standard for inclusivity in the sustainable fashion industry. The initiatives ensured that all employees, regardless of their work location or background, felt valued and respected, leading to a more cohesive and productive workforce.