

Systemic Barriers and Biases: A Short Guide

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Systemic barriers place unequal value on individuals from different backgrounds, screening certain groups from participation, and preventing progress. While these policies and practices don't usually set out to exclude or marginalise, their effect is to concentrate power among those who already have it.

SYSTEMIC BIAS

Also known as institutional bias. This is unconscious prejudice embedded in systemic barriers such as unfair policies, differences in opportunities, and inequitable treatment.

IMPLICIT BIAS

Also known as unconscious bias. This occurs when an individual has an attitude – either positive or negative – towards certain groups without realising it. These over-generalised and stereotype-confirming thoughts often come and go without the conscious mind noticing them. This can cause an individual to practice discriminatory behaviour while believing they are being entirely fair.

COGNITIVE BIASES

Common, [unconscious errors in thinking](#) that arise from the way our minds try to simplify the world. They affect our interactions with others and the way we make decisions. Acknowledging these biases can help us identify when they arise and find ways to side-step what can often be prejudicial snap judgments. [Cognitive diversity](#), or the inclusion of people with different ways of thinking, on your decision-making team can counter cognitive biases.

ANTI-RACISM

Because systemic racism isn't caused by a few racist people, simply "not being racist" does not get at the heart of the problem. This is where the concept of being "[anti-racist](#)" comes into play – to promote equity, we have to actively dismantle both the individual and systemic discriminatory practices perpetuating inequity.



LEARN MORE

Stanford's [collection of resources](#) examining systemic racism and how to advance racial justice in America.

"Erasing Institutional Bias: Structural Change, Starting with You," by Tiffany Jana and Ashley Diaz Mejias.

Anti-bias facilitator Leesa Renée Hall on the difference between [Systemic Bias and Implicit Bias](#). Take a [self assessment](#) to get started on better understanding your own biases.

Take a deep dive on cognitive bias in Ben Yagoda's "[The Cognitive Biases Tricking Your Brain](#)"

[What an anti-racist business strategy looks like](#) by Laysha Ward in HBR