

Cognitive Bias Reduction in the Workplace and Inclusive Language

In professional environments, we often assume that our decisions are based on objective observation. We evaluate people, select candidates, give feedback, and make judgements about competence, motivation, or potential. Most of the time, we believe that we are simply seeing the situation as it is.

However, psychology shows us something more complex. The human brain does not process all information equally. It selects, organises and simplifies. It looks for patterns and creates shortcuts, because without them we would be overwhelmed by the amount of information we face every day. These shortcuts are useful. They help us act quickly.

But sometimes they also influence our judgement without us noticing.

A confident person may be perceived as more competent. A quiet person may be seen as less engaged. Someone similar to us may feel more trustworthy. Once an initial impression is formed, we may start looking for information that confirms it, while paying less attention to information that challenges it.

This is how cognitive bias often works. Not always intentionally. Not always visibly. Often, very quietly. This is also where language becomes important.

Language is not only a tool for communication. It shapes how we interpret people and situations. There is a difference between saying:

"She is not leadership material."

and saying:

"She has not yet developed some specific leadership skills."

The first sentence creates a label. The second one describes a development area. One closes possibilities; the other keeps space for learning and growth.

In the workplace, phrases such as "not a good fit", "too emotional", "not confident enough", or "difficult person" may sound ordinary, even professional. Yet they often carry assumptions that are not clearly stated. They may influence how people are evaluated, supported, promoted, or excluded.



For this reason, inclusive language should not be understood only as a matter of correct terminology. It is also a matter of professional responsibility.

Inclusive language asks us to slow down and examine what we are really describing. Are we naming observable behaviour? Are we using evidence? Or are we turning an interpretation into a conclusion?

This connection between cognitive bias reduction and inclusive language is central to workplace learning. Both require awareness, reflection, and practice. Both help professionals move from automatic judgement to more conscious decision-making.

For adult educators, VET providers, HR professionals and managers, this is especially important. Learning environments and workplaces are not only shaped by formal policies. They are also shaped by everyday words, informal feedback, recruitment discussions, evaluation forms and team conversations.

***Words become decisions.
Decisions become opportunities.
And opportunities shape people's professional lives.***

We cannot eliminate all cognitive bias. This would not be realistic. But we can learn to notice more. We can create more structured decision-making processes. We can use clearer criteria. We can choose language that describes behaviour rather than fixes identity.

And when we notice more, we can choose better.

More information about this topic and about the training course on bias reduction and inclusive language in the workplace, developed within the DEIMAN4FINANCE project, is available at: deiman4finance.eu.



Visit us: <https://deiman4finance.eu/>

