2017

Potential For Progress: Implicit Bias Training's Journey To Making Change

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Abstract
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Keywords
Implicit bias training, diversity, organizational change, Kotter’s Model
POTENTIAL FOR PROGRESS: IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING’S JOURNEY TO MAKING CHANGE

By

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An Undergraduate Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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MAY 2017
Abstract

With its science-based approach, implicit bias training has won widespread popularity among scholars and diversity experts and proved itself a valuable service, with the average one-day course costing companies up to $6,000, according to experts. However, to date, implicit bias training’s impact on firm-level diversity remains unclear. This paper discusses implicit bias training as a method of diversity training and explores its potential to make tangible organizational change. Through a qualitative investigation of implicit bias training in technology firms, this study finds that implicit bias training’s potential to increase diversity within organizations remains promising, but the implementation of implicit bias training programs is faulty. Using Kotter’s 8-Step Model for Organizational Change (1995; 2007) as a framework for analysis, this study shows that, as currently practiced, implicit bias training insufficiently fulfills multiple, critical steps needed to produce organizational change. This paper argues that these shortcomings are stifling implicit bias training’s potential to advance diversity, and suggests that by addressing said shortcomings in implementation, implicit bias training may more effectively create tangible change in organizations.

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Disciplines
Business | Organizational Management
**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past several years, implicit bias training has come to the forefront of diversity training as a new technique employed to make progress in organizations. Given the spotlight on implicit bias training as a relatively new technique, this research focuses on the following question: **What is the potential for implicit bias training to make organizational change?**

Academic research on implicit bias training suggests that this kind of technique does indeed have the potential to increase diversity within organizations. However, as will be discussed in this investigation of implicit bias training in tech firms, the implementation of these programs needs to be improved in order to better ensure the possibility for making organizational change. By addressing implicit bias training’s shortcomings in relation to Kotter’s 8-Step Model for Organizational Change, both those who create and those who utilize implicit bias training products for organizations will be able to take steps toward making progress.

**Literature Review**

For decades, diversity in the workplace has been a significant topic of scholarly conversation. During the second half of the 20th century, legislation that prohibited discrimination based on factors such as gender, race, and religion, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were enacted and are attributed to starting this conversation (Showers 2016). Shortly after, the question of whether firms instituted diversity measures just to be compliant arose, and firms began to stress that they actually do see the importance of making diversity a priority, rather than just as a means of being compliant (Robinson and Dechant 1997). Over the past few decades, firms have tried to show that they value fostering diversity, and have tried to make their organizations more inclusive. In fact, according to Anand and Winders, approximately $8 billion dollars is spent annually on diversity training (2008).
“Increasing diversity” is defined differently based on an organization’s specific diversity and inclusion (D&I) goals and initiatives. For many companies, increasing diversity is thought of as increasing representation amongst certain groups of individuals (based on race or gender, for example). This in itself is a point of discussion within relevant literature, as well as within organizations that are committed to improving diversity. When firms create the goal of having increased representation, it speaks to increasing diversity in an outcome sense. On the other hand, increasing diversity can be looked at as more of a process-related journey, as companies strive to change the attitudes and behaviors of employees so that they truly see the value in working with people of various backgrounds.

For several years, the conversation surrounding workplace diversity has focused on stating and proving the business case for diversity. It has been found that companies with more diversity, particularly in regards to ethnicity and gender, are up to 35% more likely to outperform their less-diverse counterparts (Hunt, Layton and Prince 2015). Thus, firms have made increasing diversity even more of a priority over the past several years, as shown by industry and company initiatives across the globe. For example, in 2010, the 30% Club initiative was launched in Europe in an effort to increase gender diversity on FTSE-100 corporate boards, specifically by having all boards composed of at least 30% women by the end of 2015.¹ At the same time, diversity initiatives are often critiqued and lead to the question of whether or not quotas or any other type of requirement really helps to foster diversity at all. Overall, the consensus seems to be that diversity is truly beneficial and can contribute positively to the success of an organization (Gilbert and Ivancevich 2000; Page 2007).

¹ Retrieved from http://30percentclub.org/ (The current figure for the UK is 26%, a bit under the goal. The figure for the U.S. is 23.2%)
Given the perceived importance of fostering and promoting diversity in the workplace, organizations have made an effort to implement diversity training methods with the goal of addressing workplace diversity issues properly. However, recent studies have found that several of the most common D&I programs, including mandatory training and company grievance systems, have led to decreased representation amongst minority managers over time (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Dobbin and Kalev suggest that forced compliance and negative messaging cause overall adverse effect.

The limited progress resulting from these traditional D&I programs has led organizational diversity professionals to search for new, more effective D&I methods. In the past few years, implicit bias training (also known as unconscious bias training) has become increasingly prevalent. As per the Kirwan Institute, implicit bias is defined as:

…the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control (2015).

The implicit-association test (IAT), developed in 1998 by Anthony Greenwald, Debbie McGhee and Jordan Schwartz, measures the strength of automatic associations, and has been used as a go-to tool to show individuals the latency of many of their own biases (Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji 2003). Despite some studies have shown that the IAT has weaker validity in certain situations,² there is an extensive amount of research that asserts its validity (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann and Banaji 2009; Nosek, Greenwald and Banaji 2004). By October 2015,

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² IAT validity is lower when testing in-group-versus-out-group classification rather than race, for example (Popa-Roch and Delmas 2010; Blair, Judd, Havranek and Steiner 2010).
over 17 million individual IAT sessions had been conducted, speaking to its perceived credibility (Singal 2017).

Much of implicit bias’s current relevance stems from law enforcement matters: implicit bias training has been widely adopted in the American law enforcement industry, as a result of the significant number of shootings of unarmed Black men by police officers (Davidson 2016; Hall, Hall and Perry 2016). More recently, implicit bias training has been focused on by scholars to shed light on its ability to show that we are not yet in a post-racial society (Lee 2013). However, the importance of implicit bias has spread to other industries and the corporate world overall. In corporate and white-collar settings, research suggests that implicit bias can negatively affect hiring practices, and results in disparate and discriminatory treatment of employees (Krieger and Fiske 2006). Due to this, firms of varying industries, sizes and functions have become interested in employing implicit bias training to better their practices. As such, many D&I consulting firms, such as Cook Ross and Paradigm, have become global sellers of training products.

Although implicit bias training sessions vary from company to company in how they are developed and structured, there are certain foundational aspects that are standard across the board. Most implicit bias training sessions emphasize a science-based approach, focusing on how the brain works and the fact that our brain engages in decision-making, even when we are not aware of it. Eric Peterson, a senior consultant at Cook Ross, a full-service, organizational transformation consulting firm, explained his firm’s approach to training: “It is important to know that we all do this [make implicit judgements], and it’s a survival mechanism. What we [consultants] teach you how to do is, when appropriate, slow your decision-making process down, and separate fact from interpretation.” So, although training emphasizes that implicit
decision-making is a part of human nature, it also gives participants strategies on how to work against those implicit judgements in order to make conscious, less-biased decisions. As implicit bias training has been seen as more and more promising in terms of its potential to make tangible improvements in diversity (Eric Peterson, personal communication, Jan. 4, 2017; Respondent 7, personal communication, Feb. 9, 2017; Sigal Barsade, personal communication, Feb. 17, 2017) many companies have made training sessions mandatory for employees. Many firms even include implicit bias training as a part of a larger training session or onboarding process, or as part of team-specific development meetings, such as “all-hands” or “off-sites.”

Implicit bias training sessions explore various kinds of diversity, further speaking to its appeal. These sessions provide insight on more spotlighted types of diversity, such as gender, ethnic and ability, but also on less popular types as well. For example, some firms create sessions that focus on differences in leadership style and communication, explaining how more introverted professionals are often victims of bias-based actions, such as having their ideas openly disregarded in meetings. Some implicit bias training sessions even focus on diversity in height, using the fact that nearly 60% of all American CEOs are over six feet tall (which is disproportionate to the general population) as an example of how bias plays into promotion decisions. ³ These are just a few examples of the many workplace decisions that end up being affected by implicit biases, which training helps to shed light on. Overall, the implicit bias training market continues to expand and establish itself as a valuable diversity initiative. In fact, companies pay up to $6,000, on average, for a one-day course for up to 50 employees, according

to Cook Ross founder, Howard Ross (Miller 2015). Its popularity continues to grow as firms realize the value of the information being shared with those who undergo implicit bias training.

As mentioned, implicit bias is a part of human nature, but the goal of studying and shedding light on implicit bias is to bring awareness to it. In studies, such as that conducted by Devine et al. (2012), implicit bias is treated as a habit that can be broken through the following: awareness of implicit bias, concern about the effects of that bias, and the application of strategies to reduce bias. Additionally, according to the Kirwan Institute, unwanted implicit biases can be diminished. So, there is evidence to support the claim that implicit bias training can truly help to reduce the presence of implicit bias in the workplace, in an ultimate effort to reduce workplace diversity issues.

To reiterate, experts say implicit bias training’s rise to prominence has occurred approximately within the last seven years, making it a relatively new technique in the white-collar workplace (Neal Goodman, personal communication, Feb. 20, 2017). Interestingly enough, some of the “least diverse” industries have been the ones to really champion the move toward incorporating this training into firm practices. Specifically, many companies in the tech industry—known as one of the “whitest” and most male-dominated industries (Daileda 2016)—have been employing implicit bias training as a means of trying to improve representation and D&I practices within their organizations.

However, while it appears that a serious investment and a sincere effort is being made in implicit bias training, implicit bias training has major perceived shortcomings. Looking at

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common outcome data for D&I, including gender and racial diversity of employees and of managers, it is clear that the needle has yet to really move in making progress (Miller 2015; Stephanie Lampkin, personal communication, Jan. 11, 2017; Neal Goodman, personal communication, Feb. 20, 2017; Zarya 2015). Of course, as diversity trainers and their clients admit, one implicit bias training session is not enough to reach a firm’s D&I goals, regardless of what they may be. However, implicit bias training has been expected to effectively catalyze an improvement in D&I efforts, especially in industries where a lack of diversity has always been an issue. Given the substantial science on implicit bias, this paper aims to uncover shortcomings related to the implementation of implicit bias training that may be preventing substantial strides in fostering organizational diversity.

**IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING AND KOTTER’S MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

Making organizational change of any kind is a difficult and demanding task. When you add to that a change that requires modifications in not only employees’ actions, but also, their ways of thinking and decision-making processes (as implicit bias training calls for), change can seem like a nearly impossible feat.

After observing leaders for over 40 years in their transformation efforts, professor and leadership expert John Kotter developed the 8-Step Process for Making Change (Kotter, 1995; 2007). Kotter’s model has been used worldwide to help organizations manage the process of change in various contexts. Mapping the implementation of implicit bias training onto Kotter’s model reveals a comprehensive overview of where implicit bias training excels, as well as where it falls short.
As implicit bias training is predicted to help make organizational change, it is appropriate to see how well (or not well) training and its implementation actually allow for that change to be made. After all, if employees cannot actually apply what they learn in training, can implicit bias training actually help to make change? The end goal of this research is to provide insight on the application of implicit bias training content, training implementation and how employees can make tangible change. Thus, it makes sense to use Kotter’s 8-Step Process for Making Change (see Exhibit A) as a framework for implicit bias training’s ability to enact organizational change. By examining the data gathered, suggestions can be made on how to increase the effectiveness of training so that its maximum potential to make organizational change can be reached.

Research Design

For this research, primary data was collected through 22 semi-structured and inductive interviews, which were transcribed and coded (see Exhibit B for interview questions). There were three categories of individuals interviewed for this project. The first group consisted of five professionals who have extensive background in D&I work. Three of these experts are consultants by trade, offering various types of D&I training to client firms. The second group consisted of five in-house diversity specialists: managers and HR personnel at firms that contract implicit bias training services and whose roles tie in directly with company D&I initiatives. The third group consisted of twelve professionals who have completed implicit bias training, ranging from entry-level employees to managers (see Exhibit C for a table of interviewee details).

To provide a narrower scope, this paper focuses solely on implicit bias training in the technology industry. In 2014, several huge tech firms published their workplace diversity statistics, allowing all the world to see just how much work these firms need to do in order to increase organizational diversity (Huet 2015). Since then, many tech firms have been at the
forefront of this widespread adoption of implicit bias training. As several tech firms have implemented implicit bias training in hopes of finally boosting diversity within their organizations, this industry is an appropriate one to study for this research. In this study, all but one interviewee works in the tech industry and/or has specific experience working with tech clients.

After the data was collected, it was analyzed and categorized in an effort to find common themes discussed. Those common themes were then examined through the lens of Kotter’s 8-Step Model to map the process and implications of implicit bias training onto this process for making change, identifying where the strengths and weaknesses of implicit bias training and its implementation fit in amongst the model. The following analysis elaborates on each of Kotter’s eight steps, providing the current status (“Sufficient” or “Insufficient”) of implicit bias training in the tech industry, as discovered in interviews.

**Step 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency | Status: Insufficient**

Although Kotter argues that all eight steps of the model are needed in order to successfully create organizational change, the first, “establishing a sense of urgency,” is one of the most crucial steps. In fact, over 50% of companies fail in this first stage, as it is harder than it may sound to effectively establish a sense of urgency (Kotter 1995, 97; 2007). As Kotter puts it, only a few successful organizations out of those he studied were able to “manufacture a crisis” (98). In other words, they were able to communicate just how detrimental the potential downsides were to not making change, which is key in sufficiently completing this first step toward change.
Furthermore, Kotter states that a key piece to establishing this sense of urgency amongst firms is communicating the fact that there are tangible, business downsides looming, such as, “new competition, shrinking margins, decreasing market share flat earnings, a lack of revenue growth, or other relevant indices of declining competitive competition” (98).

From the data gathered, consultants often do mention the business case for diversity during training, but do not communicate it in a way that is establishes a clear sense of urgency, as this step advocates for. As Peterson put it, “Rather than imbue it with a sense of urgency, we stress that the business case for making diversity progress has to be thought of with a permanent mindset” (personal communication, Jan. 4, 2017). For good reason, consultants emphasize that fighting against this unconscious decision-making process is something learned over time, highlighting the fact that it cannot be corrected instantly. Peterson further explained that “Stressing urgency often leads to short-term fixes, which can be counter-productive in the long-term,” highlighting a potential tradeoff that consultants might consider when developing their implicit bias training products. Although Peterson’s point certainly carries validity, it does objectively work against this first step of Kotter’s model: the situation must be framed as one that needs immediate correction, otherwise tangible improvements might not actually be made or seen. In this case, it seems to be that the nature of the beast itself complicates things: as implicit bias is a part of human nature, it takes time to work against. So, training people to do so makes it inherently harder to establish a sense of urgency.

Undoubtedly, conversations surrounding diversity can be quite difficult and off-putting. In fact, when shown pro-diversity messages, white male employees physically respond as though they are under threat (Dover, Major and Kaiser 2016). Consulting firms design training in a way that aims to preclude as much of a tense conversation as possible and the possibility of
participants feeling threatened or attacked. This understandably plays into why there is no clear sense of urgency established in relation to training implementation. Focusing on lost market share or a lack of revenue growth might not lead to a single person or group of people feeling attacked, but it would certainly affect the entire group’s morale and could leave everyone feeling as though they are partially responsible (or at fault) for these business issues that would be further exasperated by a lack of D&I progress.

As such, the effort to create a comfortable, blame-free environment effectively works against the possibility of explicitly creating this sense of urgency, essentially illustrating a tradeoff between tone of conversation and (sense of) time. If consultants or in-house diversity specialists were to highlight the fact that a lack of diversity could seriously hurts the firm’s bottom line, the possibility of having a completely relaxed atmosphere would be compromised. The following quote describes Peterson’s experience leading previous diversity training sessions that did not prioritize creating a comfortable environment, as well as having participants who expected to be attacked:

“I used to do a lot of diversity training that essentially divided the room into heroes, victims and villains around diversity, and nobody likes to be a villain. People sometimes embrace the victim role even though that’s not really productive, and there weren’t a lot of heroes in the room. And the topic scared people. You’d walk into a class around D&I: you would see a whole bunch of people with their arms folded who were just ready to be attacked. My interpretation of all that was, “I haven’t said a word to you yet. Why are you so scared? You must know there’s something going on with you that made you reluctant to come to this.”

Context is also a key factor in whether or not this sense of urgency can truly be established. The consultants interviewed mentioned that their clients choose to implement implicit bias training for various reasons. Some of those reasons can be classified as reactive, while many others can be classified as proactive. With the latter, especially, it is hard for companies to truly establish a sense
of urgency. Viewing implicit bias training as a way to improve decision-making as a way over time is commendable, but does not communicate the message of “we need to do better immediately— or else.”

Ultimately, it makes sense that the tone used in implicit bias training sessions aims to create an environment in which no participant or group of participants feels at fault for issues related to D&I. However, as implicit bias training is currently practiced, the emphasis placed on creating a blame-free, low-stress environment undermines the need to establish a clear sense of urgency in order to make real organizational change. The dire business consequences of a lack of diversity are not really highlighted during training. Instead, the focus is on creating a “marathon, not a sprint” mentality (Eric Peterson, personal communication, Jan. 4, 2017) and an environment in which professionals do not feel at fault for the issues being discussed.

**Step 2: Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition | Status: Sufficient**

When explaining the second step of the model, Kotter cites the importance of being able to “form a powerful guiding coalition.” In other words, change can only be enacted if there is a group of people dedicated to and charged with leading that change. In the context of implicit bias training and overall D&I initiatives, this is especially important. As the goal behind implementing implicit bias training (like other D&I efforts) is to essentially challenge the status quo, it takes committed individuals to begin to make this change and set proper examples. Over the last several years, more and more companies have realized the importance in having a team or division specifically charged with rolling out D&I policies and initiatives. From the data gathered in this study, 100% of the large tech companies represented have a specific team dedicated to D&I.
According to one Fortune 100 corporate communications director, a cultural shift related to D&I occurred with the installation of their newest CEO (Respondent 8, personal communication, Feb. 9, 2017). At the new CEO’s instruction, the company created a global inclusion business strategy, detailing four pillars to “drive D&I business throughout [the company] and externally as well,” said the corporate communications director. This is an especially admirable instance of forming a powerful guiding coalition because the CEO—the most powerful employee in the organization—was a catalyst in making this change happen. With buy-in of this magnitude, the potential for creating organizational change is quite high.

This step of Kotter’s model has also been crucial for tech companies that publicly struggle with discrimination claims, even those that are externally-facing. One interviewee, a software engineer at a multi-billion dollar tech firm, stated that his organization responded to serious discrimination claims by consumers by creating a team specifically focused on anti-discrimination initiatives. He described it as a “fully-fledged” team that has members with various functions, from product designers to marketing managers. The team is seen as just as legitimate as any other micro-team within the company, speaking to the organization’s dedication to mitigating these issues related to D&I. This team was responsible for handling the initial reaction to these claims, which it did by sharing a public statement and proposal to fighting discrimination. According to both employees and consumers, the anti-discrimination team’s work (including new transaction policies that fight customer discrimination) has already proved to be effective. Overall, the team continues to express its commitment to fighting diversity issues both externally and internally, as it works on creating further customer-related changes to preclude claims of discrimination. Although this is a team whose function is primarily
external-facing (i.e. serving the customer), it still shows how crucial a team of dedicated employees is taking steps toward change.

Generally, this data asserts that many tech firms have a dedicated team of people leading the change through institutionalized D&I teams. Companies speak to their commitment to making change by putting these “guiding coalitions” together and for some, by having their most powerful members as a part of this team. This further speaks to the potential of implicit bias training as a D&I initiative to create change.

**Steps 3 & 4: Creating the Vision and Communicating the Vision | Status: Insufficient**

Under steps three and four, Kotter cites the importance of being able to “create a vision” and “communicate a vision,” respectively. A vision is defined as “a mental image of what the future will or could be like.” Kotter elaborates on how to properly think of a vision in the context of this model: it is essentially the ideal picture of what the organization will look like after changes are made. In order to first create then communicate this desired mental image, goals need to be set and worked toward by all members of the organization.

Out of the twelve professionals interviewed about their experience undergoing implicit bias training, none of them were able to confirm that the professional who had led training explicitly outlined the goals that the group was expected to meet for the session. Furthermore, when asked, “Were you prompted to set any personal goals? If not, did you do so anyway,” 83% of interviewees responded by saying that they were not instructed to set personal goals and therefore, did not (see Exhibit D). One product marketing manager at a Fortune 100 tech firm followed up with her response by admitting, “I wasn’t expecting to get a lot out of it”

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(Respondent 15, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2017). She was not alone: several other professionals who underwent training also spoke to the skepticism they felt. For these participants in particular, it would have been helpful for the consultant conducting training to prompt employees to set personal goals at the start of the session. This could have potentially increased buy-in and interest in participating amongst employees.

As each of the consultants mentioned in their interviews, the goals and eventually key performance indicators (KPIs) used to structure and evaluate implicit bias training sessions are those of their clients. The issue is that the client’s goals and KPIs do not always speak to the value of implicit bias training and how well the content and takeaways of training resonated with participants. For instance, if a tech firm hires a consulting firm to conduct training in hopes of increasing representation amongst female mid-level managers by five percent, the consulting firm then measures success by whether or not the client was able to meet that goal, which does not specifically speak to implicit bias training’s impact on the organization. While it makes sense that the consulting firm would measure their own success on the success of its clients, doing so contributes to a lack of explicit goal-setting for participants in regards to what they should walk away from training with. This decreases the potential to make change through implicit bias training since the content of training itself is not being tied into how goals are set and measured.

Additionally, from the data gathered, there are insufficient steps being taken in regards to painting a picture of implicit bias training and the lessons that participants walk away with. In other words, implicit bias training does not adequately provide infrastructure for future success to ensure that a change will be carried out. As mentioned, Kotter himself describes the vision as a “picture of the future” that helps guide the organization in the appropriate direction going forward (98-99). Thus, focus on and guidance for the future is rather important for these steps.
When asked about follow-up procedures, one implicit bias training consultant mentioned that there were no standard follow-up procedures in place. Instead, they got a sense of “what the client would need” (John Sullivan, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2017) as their original product was being purchased. So, the norm is to provide training for the client and then essentially send them on their way, expecting the client to reach out to purchase further services in the future. While it was made clear that these consulting firms stress the importance of the client having its own diversity strategy to complement training, interviews with training consultants made it clear that consulting firms did not really take it upon themselves to follow-up.

If consulting firms were to include standard follow-up procedures as a part of their services, it would help take the content and value of implicit bias training beyond one session, and help in creating and communicating the vision for change going forward. Plus, this could possibly result in consulting firms being able to make a compelling business case for charging higher prices, given that clients would get more out of their services with these follow-up procedures. Rather than one-off sessions, this could potentially lead to implicit bias training becoming more of a long-term service, which would presumably be beneficial for all parties involved, as long as clients are truly committed to making tangible diversity progress. Until then, the lack of follow-up procedures and emphasis on taking training content beyond the session precludes the possibility of a vision, or image of the future, being truly created or communicated by implicit bias training.

**Step 5: Empowering Others to Act on the Vision | Status: Sufficient**

The fifth step of Kotter’s model focuses on ensuring that employees are given the tools and sense of empowerment to effectively enact change. Although the data in this study asserts
that a clear vision is neither being created nor communicated to participants, employees still show evidence of being empowered to act on the change they hope to see. In other words, this step of the model is sufficiently executed, as employees are taking it upon themselves to take steps toward the change they would like to see resulting from implicit bias training.

As mentioned previously, the underlying purpose of shedding light on this aspect of human nature is to get people to be more aware of it. According to Peterson (the senior consultant at a full-service consulting firm):

…it’s all about raising awareness of how you make decisions. One of the things we know about the brain is that it is uniquely unaware of its own functioning…[so the idea is] becoming aware of how your own brain works, how biases can be created by patterns in the world, and how you can employ a few basic strategies that we can put forth to do better (personal communication, Jan. 4, 2017).

These interviews suggest that employees truly do feel empowered in making change regarding implicit bias. Two interviewees cited examples from meetings in the workplace in which they essentially realized displays of (implicit) bias. Beyond noticing them (and showing that they were now more aware of implicit bias after training), they each took it upon themselves to take action. Respondent 9, a chief diversity officer, confronted a peer after a meeting in which he felt that his coworker inappropriately addressed a female coworker. He explained the situation:

I was in a meeting earlier today with a junior woman and a more senior man. We were preparing for a meeting we were going to have next week with a client, and the senior man referred to the woman as, ‘this girl that covers our fund.’ And I responded, ‘Oh, you mean a woman that covers our fund?’

Because for me, that statement felt very uncomfortable. Whereas for him, from the environment he is probably working in, that is closer to norm. The environment, the background, his personal environment, whatever it is… that doesn’t sound wrong to him.

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Interviewee is a CDO of a financial services firm, but identified similar trends to those represented by tech firms
Meanwhile, I’m sure it’s incredibly offensive to the junior woman who is working for him, who is 24 [years old], and is like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ And, I mean, not that I had to go through D&I training to know that that’s offensive, but the thing is, when you teach senior leaders to call out behavior, you make people aware of those things. Even if everyone works on one thing, you can create an environment where people are teaching each other, and redefining the norm. And I noticed this (personal communication, Feb. 3, 2017).

Respondent 15 (aforementioned product marketing manager at a Fortune 100 tech firm) was on the opposite end of this display of empowerment to make change. She had a coworker come up to her after a meeting, apologizing for perceived displays of bias on the part of a fellow male coworker. She explained:

A peer came up to me after a meeting. He said, “It felt to me like there was a lot of mansplaining\(^8\) in that meeting. People were being so dismissive of your perspective, and it was really frustrating because what you were saying was so valid.”

They [male coworkers] had been kind of condescending but I didn’t really even notice. Having someone else say something to me was a huge step forward. The next step forward would be him saying something in the room to his fellow co-workers (personal communication, Jan. 17, 2017).

Other professionals have cited their feelings of empowerment and responsibility as well in regards to putting what they learned from training to use. Respondent 18, a general manager of a product marketing division, mentioned how one of his biggest takeaways from training was the fact that “you don’t actually know people until you are given the opportunity to get to know them.” He elaborated further: “So, listening to some of the others’ stories [during training]—it’s profound to say, ‘I actually don’t know anything about other people.’ It forces you to grapple, which I think is very healthy. If it’s done right, everyone would come away from training realizing this, in my mind” (personal communication, Feb. 3, 2017).

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\(^8\) Mansplain: (of a man) to comment on or explain something to a woman in a condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner (Retrieved from http://www.dictionary.com/browse/mansplain)
Since undergoing training, Respondent 18 has taken it upon himself to start a team-wide weekly newsletter that features a team member’s non-work related accomplishment, such as someone completing a 5K over the weekend, or celebrating a big anniversary. He believes that this helps coworkers get to know each other beyond what they learn in the office. This deeper knowledge then plays into how employees interact with each other in the workplace and also helps to work against implicit biases, as people will slow down their judgment-making process based on the conscious efforts they are making to get to know others.

According to Dr. Sigal Barsade, an expert in implicit bias and professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, implicit or unconscious bias can be understood as an equation:

\[
\text{Unconscious Associations} + \text{Cultural Stereotypes} = \text{Unconscious Bias}
\]

Given that professionals are making an effort to get to know more about their coworkers’ lives and backgrounds outside of the workplace, this helps to break down the ‘Cultural Stereotypes’ piece of the equation, which ultimately helps work against the effects of the ‘Unconscious Associations’ being made. Overall, this data asserts that professionals are taking it upon themselves to make steps toward change following implicit bias training, and by doing so, demonstrating just how empowered they feel to make change.

**Steps 6 & 7: Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins and Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change | Status: Insufficient**

The sixth step of the model is “planning for and creating short-term wins.” Based on the data gathered, implicit bias training in the tech world tends to adopt a long-term mindset (Eric
Peterson, personal communication, Jan. 4, 2017). Needless to say, an emphasis on the long-term works against this step, which focuses on progress in the near future.

Additionally, as Kotter describes, a component of this sixth step is “visible performance improvements” (1995, 99; 2007). Without action items, it is hard to create visible performance improvements since employees might not have a clear idea of how exactly to take what they have learned and put it into action. Perhaps the biggest shortcoming uncovered in this study is the fact that implicit bias training does not leave its participants with actionable takeaways. If there aren’t ways for professionals to put what they have learned into use as soon as possible, in the short-term, momentum and potential for change can be easily lost. Without actionable items, there is no way to effectively measure if training was truly successful – that is, capable of motivating organizational change – in either the short- or the long-term.

Some interviewees recognized this shortcoming and elaborated on the perceived lack of actionable and relatable takeaways. For example, Respondent 6, a university recruiter and in-house diversity specialist, advocated that implicit bias training content be directly tied to job function. She believes implicit bias training would be more effective if training sessions addressed how implicit biases might play out specifically in sales roles when being conducted for members of the sales division, for example. “It would allow for the information to really resonate with employees and make it easier to walk away with it,” she explained (personal communication, Jan. 17, 2017). This recruiter’s suggestion merits further study, as more targeted training with job-specific action strategies would both make employees feel more connected to the training material and help them understand how they specifically could foster change via short-term action items through how they do their own jobs.
Additionally, implicit bias training also insufficiently fulfills step seven, “consolidating improvements and producing still more change.” When explaining this step, Kotter speaks to the importance of putting structures in place that allow change efforts to stay persistent (102). From the data gathered, only one of the tech companies represented conducts implicit bias training yearly. However, even at that firm, the training is a completely new program each time, rather than a session that includes a follow-up assessment, or any sort of measure that connects to the previous session, in an effort to examine how much employees have retained since the previous training. As “failing to score successes early enough (12-24 months into the change effort)” is one of the pitfalls cited by Kotter (2007, “The Idea in Practice”), it might make sense to have each training session do a post-assessment six to twelve months after training, as well as some sort of message to reinforce what was learned—whether a short slide show sent with the post-assessment, or an online module. This would help ensure that the content of implicit bias training is being reinforced, thus helping to increase the chance of information from training being effectively retained, so that progress can eventually be made.

To reiterate, with the long-term focus mentioned previously, there is essentially no pressure from the consultants who conduct training to make sure these messages and takeaways are drilled into participants’ minds. This sense of persistence is not effectively communicated or created, since training is often perceived as a one-and-done deal, and even in instances of recurring training, there is no way to assess the continued growth of the professional in regards to how their implicit bias training experiences have shaped their actions post-training.

**Step 8: Institutionalizing New Approaches | Status: Insufficient**

The final step of the model is “institutionalizing new approaches.” Although the model is sequential, meaning potential for successful fulfillment of each step depends on whether or not
the previous step was fulfilled, this final step carries even more significance, as it aims to really consecrate the efforts made to create change. This step focuses on the importance of being able to take all of the new behaviors, attitudes and ideas introduced to the company and turn them into actual change. As Kotter describes, change can only take full effect when it “seeps into the bloodstream of the corporate body” (103).

Given the fact that several steps of the model are insufficiently fulfilled by implicit bias training and its implementation, it would be premature to evaluate at this moment how well this final step is fulfilled. Instead, given that improvements are made going forward, the following section provides recommendations that can help make implicit bias training more effective and consecrate these change-making efforts, once all steps of the model are eventually sufficiently fulfilled by training and its implementation,

**Next Steps: How to Make Implicit Bias Training More Effective**

As shown through the data gathered for this study, implicit bias training remains a promising tool for managers who want to promote D&I. However, there are several steps that could be taken to increase the likelihood of implicit bias training making tangible organizational change.

One suggestion is to find a way to tie the takeaways of implicit bias training into employee performance and evaluation. One highly effective way to produce results is to promote accountability by tying the desired change to numbers, such as those used in performance reviews and those that determine compensation. A lack of accountability was a common theme in the interviews conducted amongst implicit bias training participants. Respondent 11, an account manager at a Fortune 100 tech company who participated in training,
mentioned how the consultant leading the training essentially encouraged all employees to keep in mind that “everyone has good intentions.” As described by the account manager, it felt as though this precluded a real sense of accountability being left with participants. To her, it came off as a way of allowing employees to get away with not actually making an effort to utilize what they learned in training: “It felt as though the discussion consisted of people congratulating themselves for being well-intentioned, rather than actually committing to making change by being more open-minded” (Respondent 11, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2017). Especially in the workplace, this lack of accountability can have severe, negative implications for the firm.

One of the companies represented in the data has found a way to take steps toward fostering accountability in regards to implicit bias training and other diversity initiatives, through the use of its standard, quarterly evaluation tool. Employees are charged to elaborate on how certain initiatives play into the impact they have made as well as will make in their roles. This requirement to tie perceived impact into their evaluation is essentially a way of keeping employees accountable for their efforts in regards to company goals, such as increasing D&I. For instance, Respondent 6 (aforementioned university recruiter and in-house diversity specialist) spoke about how the evaluation form allows her to focus on the impact she has had and will continue to make in regards to mindful decision-making in the hiring process: “I find it very useful. It helps me see how well I have fulfilled previous pledges to creating impact, as well as think of ways to further make impact through my role” (Respondent 6, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2017). This recruiter’s experience is a clear example of how companies can hold all members of the organization accountable and effectively institutionalize new changes through already existing tools, such as evaluation procedures.
Another suggestion is to complement implicit bias training with the use of software products designed to fight bias. In the past several years, a handful of tech startups have created products that aim to eliminate bias, particularly during the hiring process. Entelo, a five-year old startup, offers a recruiting platform that helps firms improve their hiring decisions. The platform helps firms identify and engage with candidates that they find through Entelo’s database. Firms also use Entelo to discover the most qualified candidates who have applied for their open positions. Jill Wittly, the Vice President of Talent and Operations of Entelo, described how the company uses “predictive analytics” through the use of data science and machine-running. The software helps recruiters and corporate hiring teams evaluate candidates based on the most important qualifications, which are pre-determined by human resource managers themselves. Essentially, the software does the work of sorting through candidates itself, solely based on listed qualifications, to preclude decisions being made based on implicit biases (Jill Wittly, personal communication, Jan. 25, 2017).

Blendoor, another startup, was created by diversity and inclusion specialist, Stephanie Lampkin, in 2015. Blendoor offers hiring technology that helps to mitigate unconscious bias by removing explicit indicators on job applications. For instance, the software application removes age, name, race, gender, and any other indication of identity, so that employers are hiring based on merit. (Stephanie Lampkin, personal communication, Jan. 11, 2017). As of March 2016, Blendoor received buy-in from nearly 20 large tech firms.10

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As these software products seem to be gaining attention, and at the very least, show potential for making a difference in crucial organizational functions that affect D&I in the workplace, the possibility of using them to complement the efforts of implicit bias training could help to finally move the needle and make change. This method of institutionalizing change would certainly require more financial resources, but it would also bring firms another step closer to making change, as these crucial processes would then be altered by the use of these products and training.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As mentioned, implicit bias training has only come to prominence as a workplace diversity tool during the last decade. Therefore, it is still early to judge its effectiveness and its true potential to make change within organizations. That implicit bias training is still a relatively new realm of work and research serves as a limitation to the current project’s findings, but also provides a starting point for future research. After continued use of implicit bias training for a few more years, a comprehensive follow-up study that assesses its effectiveness would be useful to researchers and to industry.

Additionally, this study looks at only a handful of companies, some of which are known as early adopters of implicit bias training and strong proponents of D&I programs more generally. Due to this limited scope, the data collected and analyzed is only a fraction of the data that could be used to explain the potential of implicit bias training in making organizational change. Similarly, the companies represented in this research are all in the technology industry. A suggestion for further research is to collect data from companies across other industries, such as finance and law, to provide a more comprehensive look at implicit bias training and its effectiveness in making change. This will not only provide more diverse data, but also, it will
make it easier to obtain a larger sample of representative firms that employ implicit bias training. As this realm of research is fairly new overall, there is a wide range of opportunities going forward to further assess implicit bias training implementation and the possibility of effectively producing organizational change.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite a lack of clear, convincing organizational change thus far, implicit bias training has potential to make tangible progress in organizational diversity. The training and education behind implicit bias is grounded in science: there is real value in being able to educate professionals on how they unconsciously make decisions in the workplace, and how those decisions can have huge implications on their peers and the organization as a whole. In order to take implicit bias training from a high-potential technique to one that makes effective organizational change, a double-sided effort is needed: both the diversity consulting firms that create training products and firms that contract implicit bias training services can play a part in furthering the efforts behind training to make change.

As for diversity consulting firms, this study recommends that training products enforce explicit goal-setting as well as create actionable takeaways for the participants involved. Both of these recommendations will allow for employees to get a better sense of what they should walk away from training with and how they can immediately implement what they have learned in implicit bias training sessions. Another recommendation is for consulting firms to implement standard follow-up procedures to ensure that change is on its way to being made. Depending on resources, in-person or online post-assessments and brief refresher sessions would be a great way to not only reinforce what participants learned back during the session, but to also measure just
how much information they have retained and what they have done (if anything) to put those lessons into practice.

Finally, as for the client firms who bring in consultants to conduct implicit bias training, we encourage them to buttress implicit bias training implementation with other aforementioned methods of furthering elimination bias.¹¹ For example, employing the use of bias-elimination hiring software, like the products of Entelo and Blendoor, for example, could help further implicit bias training’s potential to make progress. Additionally, developing a company-specific and relevant way to tie implicit bias training takeaways to employee evaluation would encourage employees to keep implicit bias training lessons in mind. As employees reflect on their job performance throughout the previous period, they will have the chance to think about how to further improve and better incorporate implicit bias training takeaways into the upcoming performance period.¹²

Ultimately, implicit bias training has the potential to positively impact diversity and inclusion within an organization. As the potential to make organizational change is there, implicit bias training seems to be on its way to making long-awaited progress.

¹¹ Refer to previous section, “Next Steps: How to Make Implicit Bias Training More Effective”
¹² See Exhibit E for a recommendations overview table
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Exhibit B: Interview Questions

**D&I Experts/Consultants:**

Introduction of project:

My name is Olivia and I am a senior at the Wharton School. I’m doing my thesis project on implicit or unconscious bias training as a workplace diversity tool. Specifically, I am hoping to better understand the overall process of implicit bias training, as well as assess its overall potential to make organizational change.

1) Do you mind if this is recorded so I can go back and pull quotes?
2) Do you wish to remain anonymous?
   a. If no, please state name, company name, role and years in this role
3) What exactly does your company do?
4) Can you please provide a brief description of your role?
5) Originally implicit bias training was seen as connected to law enforcement, but now it is widespread in the corporate world overall. When did implicit bias training first receive attention as a workplace diversity tool?
6) Can you walk me through the process of a company reaching out to your firm for implicit bias training?
   a. How do you figure out exactly what the company needs? What factors do you assess? (If help needed: Do you assess any of company’s past history? Past issues (documented or more implicit with D&I)? Or, do you mainly concentrate on what the company hopes for going forward?
7) How does goal-setting work for your organization?
   a. Is it more so decided on your side, or based on what the client company says?
   b. Can you name examples of those goals (i.e., increase representation among managers, help create more diverse work teams, etc.)?
8) Does your implicit bias training program focus on any aspects of diversity more than others (ethnicity, gender, ability, etc.)?
9) What are some KPIs for the work you all do?
10) How long do you give yourselves to see if those goals were met?
11) Are there any standard follow up procedures in place for training sessions?
12) Is there anything else you’d like to mention regarding motivations, goals and/or evaluating impact of implicit bias training?

**In-house diversity specialists:**

Intro of project (same as above)

1) Do you mind if this is recorded so I can go back and pull quotes?
2) Do you wish to remain anonymous?
   a. If no, please state name, company name, role and years in this role
3) (If unknown) What exactly does your company do?
4) Can you please provide a brief description of your role?
5) What are some KPIs for the D&I work you do?
6) Has your firm undergone implicit bias training?
   a. How long ago was the most recent training session?
   b. Did you attend and/or participate?
7) If so, were you involved in implementing/setting up the implicit bias training program?
   a. If so, briefly describe process
8) What are motivations, implicit or explicit for exposing members of your firm to implicit bias training?
9) If you know, were goals explicitly set for the employees who underwent this training at your firm?
   a. If so, who set those goals? (i.e. the professional(s) who led training, the participants themselves, or another party?)
10) If applicable, can you list examples of those goals (i.e. increase representation among managers, help create more diverse work teams, etc.)
11) When/how will you be able to see if implicit bias training has been successful at your firm?
12) Is there anything else you’d like to mention?

**Implicit bias training participants:**

Intro of project (same as above)

1) Do you mind if this is recorded so I can go back and pull quotes?
2) Do you wish to remain anonymous?
   a. If no, please state name, company name, role and years in this role
3) What exactly does your company do?
4) Can you please provide a brief description of your role?
5) Had you participated in training before your most recent experience? If so, how many times?
6) When was the most recent time you participated in implicit bias training? (Approximate date—month and year—is fine)
7) Was this training session mandatory?
8) Approximately how long was the session?
9) Can you please summarize the training session and your experience overall?
10) Think back to first finding out that you would be participating in implicit bias training. What was your first reaction?
11) Were goals explicitly outlined and communicated by the professional conducting training?
   a. If so, do you remember any of them?
12) Were you prompted to set any personal goals? If not, did you do so anyway?
   a. If you did, can you list some examples of those goals?
13) Can you please choose three words to describe your implicit bias training experience?
   (Ask to explain word choice, if need be)
14) What are your two biggest takeaways (whether general or personal)?
15) Do you think the training was useful for your industry and company specifically?
16) What would a sign of success from this training look like for you?
17) Is there anything else you’d like to mention?
### Exhibit C: Interviewee Details

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Respondent Number</th>
<th>Company Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Date of Personal Communication</th>
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<td>Full-service Organizational Transformation Consulting Firm (Cook Ross)</td>
<td>D&amp;I Expert</td>
<td>Senior Consultant</td>
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<td>Professor</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Nael Goodman</td>
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<td>2/2/2017</td>
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<td>Jill Watson</td>
<td>Recruiting Software Startup (Esteio)</td>
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Exhibit D: Goal-Setting Question Responses

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<tr>
<th>Respondent Number (implicit bias training participants only)</th>
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<th>Response to explicit goal-setting and communication question (“Were goals explicitly outlined and communicated to the professional conducting”)</th>
<th>Response to personal goal-setting question (“Were you prompted to set any personal goals? If not, did you do so anyway?”)</th>
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Explicit Goal-Setting and Communication Question Responses

- No
- Yes

100%

Personal Goal-Setting Question Responses

- No
- Yes

83%

17%
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<th>Recommendation</th>
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<th>Step(s) of Kotter’s Model that recommendation will help to fulfill more sufficiently</th>
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<td>Steps 3 &amp; 4: Creating the Vision and Communicating the Vision</td>
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<td>Create actionable takeaways</td>
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<td>Step 6: Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins</td>
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<td>Buttress implicit bias training implementation with other methods of furthering elimination bias</td>
<td>Client firms</td>
<td>Step 8: Institutionalizing New Approaches</td>
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