The battle against bias

If bias is unconscious, how do you know you have it? What can you do about it if you find out you are biased?

One conclusion I’ve reached is that the term ‘unconscious bias’ tends to be used as shorthand for unacceptable behaviour that relates to gender, race, religion, sexuality, age and other terms that infer a particular type of discrimination. While this behaviour most definitely needs to be countered, and is biased, I’d suggest that these forms of discrimination could easily fall under the heading of unlawful behaviour.

When bias manifests as behaviour that runs counter to equality, it is underpinned by more common concepts. Those concepts have their foundation in the fact that as a species, we’ve evolved to develop shortcuts in our thinking and decision-making processes to enable us to go about our daily lives in the most efficient manner. However, in using some of these shortcuts, we open ourselves up to biases that can have a detrimental effect on our decision-making processes and behaviour towards others.

**Confirmation bias:** are you capturing what people want you to hear rather than an accurate picture of what is or could be having an impact on your organisation?

**Status quo bias:** do people not want to make any changes to the risks or controls as it will take (cognitive) effort to consider alternatives?

**Availability bias:** will people talk about risks that relate to what is at the forefront of their mind, either in terms of what they’re working on or what’s in the press at the time of your discussion?

Learning more about the different types of bias to which we are all subject will help us to understand ourselves and others in order to make better decisions and challenge discriminatory behaviour in a more constructive way.

Karla Gahan is Deputy Global Head of Risk and Advisory at VinciWorks. For more on unconscious bias, listen to Karla’s webinar at https://bit.ly/2OXjR05

### Dates for your diary

**For all IIRSM events visit iirsm.org/events**

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<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
<td>13 December 2018</td>
<td>London</td>
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<td>Annual Conference 2019</td>
<td>28 March 2019</td>
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<td>Crowd and Event Safety Conference</td>
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Members are invited to join the Council and the IIRSM’s executive team to review the year’s activities and vote in person on the matters raised.

Following the AGM, guests can enjoy a topical seminar presented by Specialist Fellow John Huckstepp. He will discuss the wealth of content that 2018 has served up in both traditional and emerging risks, and how innovation is reshaping likelihood and severity, creating opportunities for organisations to reduce and redefine risk within their operations, industries and territories.

Guests will then be invited to join IIRSM President Andy Hawkes at the President’s Reception – a networking event for members and industry colleagues.

www.iirsm.org/events/agm-2018

Events and places that attract crowds or large groups of people bring a range of unique challenges that require specialist knowledge. This one day event, which includes speakers such as Professor Keith Still, Mark Breen, Dr John Drury and Andy Neal, features fantastic presentations to help you develop a risk management strategy to keep people safe, protect your reputation and your staff.

www.iirsm.org/events/crowd-and-event-safety

This event brings together a range of speakers to help those responsible for planning and monitoring the temporary works phase of a construction project. The programme provides an effective and practical overview of the key points to consider, delivered by industry specialists.

www.iirsm.org/events/temporary-works-conference

Our 2019 conference will focus on how to adapt in an ever-changing world of risk and ensure that our organisations and our people build resilience and achieve success. Risk management is everyone’s responsibility and maintaining the status quo is no longer an option.

So how exactly do we remain relevant in this world, whatever our roles? Join us in March in London to be part of the conversation.

IIRSM knows how to deliver a conference with a difference. Experienced risk professionals help us to create topical and thought-provoking programmes which always receive excellent feedback from delegates.

We have access to some brilliant speakers thanks to our distinguished membership – not only will you learn something, but you will thoroughly enjoy the experience too.

www.iirsm.org/annual-conference-2019

Have you something amazing to share? If so, enter our awards and shout about it. Now in their second year, the awards are independent, recognising innovative individuals, teams and organisations responsible for implementing best practice in managing risks and opportunities.

Whether you work for a large multinational with big budgets or an SME or charity with limited resources, the principles of managing risks and opportunities effectively equally apply. Taking a ‘risk-based’ approach at all levels within an organisation is essential for strategy development, operational performance and a strong reputation. The awards are open to everyone and we welcome entries from all sectors and types of organisations, no matter how large or small.

www.iirsm.org/iirsm-risk-excellence-awards-2019