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# BOARDROOMS ON EDGE

## HR's Role in Protecting Your Brand's Reputation

37<sup>th</sup> Annual Workforce Management Briefing

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Your Workforce. Our Business.™

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## **BOARDROOMS ON EDGE**

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# **Did That Really Just Happen? Practical Strategies for Preventing Unconscious Biases and Microaggressions in the Workplace**



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# Practical Strategies for Preventing Unconscious Biases and Microaggressions in the Workplace

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# Understanding Implicit Bias, And Microaggressions: What Do We Know, What Can We Know?

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## Definitions

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***Understanding Implicit Bias,  
And Microaggressions:  
What Do We Know, What Can We Know?***

**October 25, 2018**

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- What Is The Implicit Association Test (IAT)?
  - A response latency task developed to measure implicit attitudes, especially stereotyping
    - Premised upon concept that regularly practiced associations are more rapidly performed than tasks that are not
      - ◆ Automatic thoughts/preferences generate faster responses than those requiring deliberation



- IAT Testing Of Attitudes Or Stereotypes Regarding African-Americans
  - First press keys which link black faces and words reflecting 'good' attitudes or stereotypes, and white faces and words reflecting 'bad' attitudes or stereotypes
  - Then keys which link black faces and negative terms, and white faces and positive terms

- IAT Testing Of Attitudes Or Stereotypes Regarding African-Americans
  - Faster test responses linking black faces with negative stereotypes or attitudes, than white faces with negative are deemed to indicate 'automatic preferences', and:
    - ◆ Unconscious bias
    - ◆ Predilection for discrimination against African-Americans
  - **Likelihood of consequent actual discriminatory behavior, assuming IAT measures such bias, greatly disputed**
    - ◆ Especially particular behavior, in particular circumstances

- Potential Manipulation Of The IAT – ‘Faking Good’
  - Intentional slowing of response time
    - Two studies <sup>(1, 2)</sup> without instruction, individuals were able to fake IAT responses
      - ◆ In one of the studies, participants were informed of the centrality of reaction times
      - ◆ Significant faking effects depended upon prior test taking, i.e., test knowledge
        - Two “experts” could not detect faking in this study

- Potential Manipulation Of The IAT – ‘Faking Good’
  - Index of “combined task slowing” detected faking with 75% accuracy <sup>(3)</sup>
    - Sample: students who were instructed to deliberately slow their responses on gender identity IATs

- Numerous Factors Most Probably Moderate The Relationship Between Implicit Attitudes And Behavior
  - Just as they influence how explicit attitudes affect behavior
    - For example
      - ◆ Accountability for production
      - ◆ Incentives promoting effective team operation
      - ◆ 'Successful' results or outcomes
      - ◆ Individuating information
        - May facilitate positive appraisal of a person who belongs to a group (or groups) which a decision-maker explicitly and/or implicitly generally negatively regards

## ■ Definition Of Microaggressions

- Subtle affronts or insults that “implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility” directed toward <sup>(4)</sup>
  - Minorities
  - Women
  - Historically stigmatized groups
- Less direct form of bias
- Original Definition (1978)
  - “Subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” <sup>(5)</sup>

## ■ Types Of Microaggressions

### ● Microassaults

- Most blatant
- “Explicit racial derogation(s) characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” <sup>(4)</sup>
  - ◆ Racial slur
  - ◆ Swastika
  - ◆ “Colored” to refer to an African-American
- Often **intentional**, as opposed to two other types of microaggressions

## ■ Types Of Microaggressions

### ● Microinsults <sup>(4)</sup>

→ Barbs, put-downs with messages that are

◆ Negative

◆ Potentially humiliating

→ Demeaning of racial heritage, or identity

→ Examples

◆ Employer: “most qualified, regardless of race” should be given position

◆ Teacher: not calling on minority student who raises hand in class

→ Not necessarily intentional



## ■ Types Of Microaggressions

### ● Microinvalidations

- "Exclude, negate, or nullify an individual's" thoughts, feelings or experiential reality <sup>(4)</sup>
  - ◆ White friends telling African-American couple that oversensitive in attributing poor service at restaurant to race
- Not necessarily intentional

- Sue's Original Nine Subtypes Of Microaggression (4)
  - Alien in One's Own Land
  - Ascription of Intelligence
  - Color-blindness
  - Assumption of Criminal Status
  - Denial of Individual Racism
  - Myth of Meritocracy
  - Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles
  - Second-Class Citizen
  - Environmental

- Examples

- Color-blindness

- "America is a melting pot"

- ◆ Message: Members of minority should conform to majority culture

## ■ Examples

### ● Myth of Meritocracy

→ I believe the “most qualified person should get the job”

◆ Message: Minorities often given an unfair advantage

- Harm From Microaggressions Versus Macroaggressions
  - “You are so articulate.” (6)
    - Microinsult or compliment
  - “Where were you born?” (6)
    - Microinvalidation or innocent curiosity
      - ◆ Questioner perceives as foreigner or sincere interest in their cultural background

### ■ Ambiguity And Legal Implications

#### ● Was there a microaggression?

- “The individual might be unable to establish if a microaggression has occurred. They are often ambiguous and thus harder to identify and categorize than overt, obvious acts of racism.”<sup>(7)</sup>
- “It is the subtle and unintentional aspects of microaggressions that make them difficult to identify because the interpersonal interactions in which they occur are often not perceived as biased or discriminatory.”<sup>(8)</sup>

## ■ Conceptual Issues

### ● Eye of the beholder

→ Comment by a White person about lack of educational opportunity, and understanding how such made first year of college challenging

- ◆ Patronizing/indirectly hostile?
- ◆ Supportive?
- ◆ A microaggression?

## ■ Correlation Is Not Causation

- Some claim that repeated microaggressions are more harmful
  - “The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than hate crimes or the covert and deliberate acts of White supremacists such as the Klan and Skinheads.” <sup>(9)</sup>



- Correlation And Causation
  - Scarce amount of longitudinal data demonstrating causation
    - All but two articles of published research is cross-sectional <sup>(6)</sup>

## ■ Perception And Causation

- “In the bulk of research to date, social perception as measured is a process dominated far more by what the judge brings to it than what he takes in during it.” <sup>(10)</sup>

- Harm From Microaggressions Versus Macroaggressions
  - Or does the distress arise from projection of problematic, internally-based personality features onto the external stimulus?
    - Creation of a genuinely believed and experienced environmental aggression
      - ◆ Or both?

- Microaggression Does Not Necessarily Indicate Presence Of Implicit Bias

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## Panel Discussion

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**Questions?**