

Beyond Awareness: Why Behaviour—Not Belief—Is Driving Leadership Bias in Caribbean Organisations

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Idea in Brief

The Problem

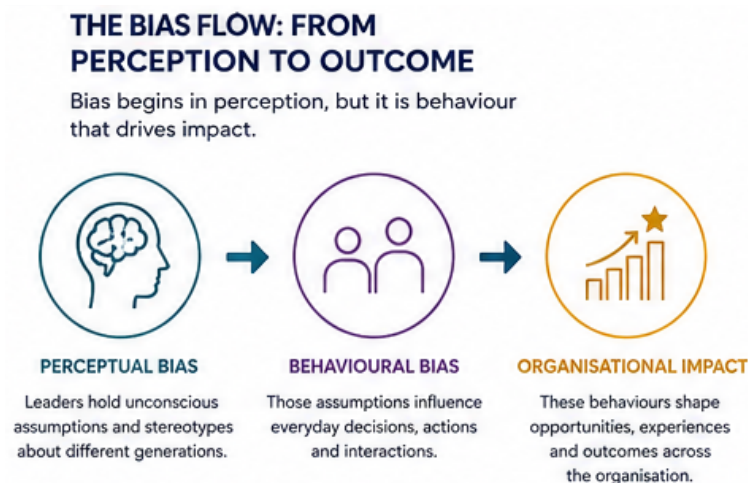
As Caribbean workplaces become increasingly multigenerational, organisations are struggling to manage the tensions, perceptions, and leadership challenges that emerge across age-diverse teams. While these challenges are often attributed to “generational differences,” far less attention is given to how leaders’ assumptions and behaviours shape employee experience, opportunity, and inclusion within the organisation.

The Insight

This research suggests that the greatest organisational risk is not generational diversity itself, but the behavioural expression of leaders’ assumptions about different generations. While leaders may consciously reject stereotypes, those perceptions can still influence how they delegate, communicate, evaluate performance, and distribute opportunity.

The Implication

Addressing bias within multigenerational workplaces requires more than increasing awareness. Organisations must examine how leadership behaviour, decision-making processes, and workplace systems may unintentionally reinforce biased patterns of inclusion, opportunity, and engagement.



Awareness may change what leaders say.
Behaviour change determines what employees experience.

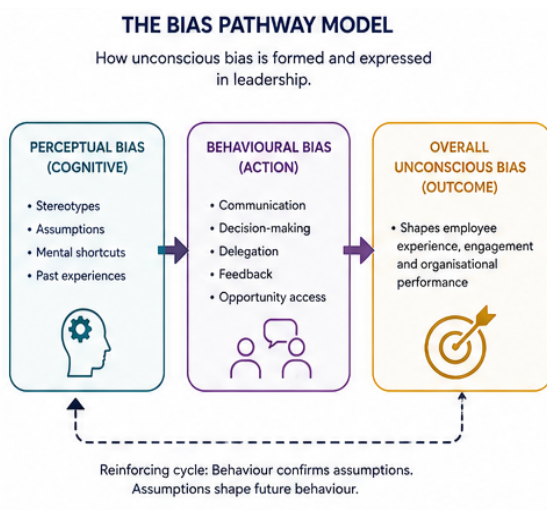
The Leadership Myth HR Must Challenge

For years, organisations have treated unconscious bias as a knowledge problem—assuming that if leaders understand bias, they will naturally behave more inclusively. This research challenges this assumption.

Across Caribbean organisations, leaders often demonstrate awareness of generational stereotypes. Yet this awareness does not consistently prevent those same assumptions from shaping how they delegate, evaluate, and develop their teams.

This reveals a critical gap: awareness may change what leaders say—but not necessarily what they *do*.

What the Research Actually Shows



This study examined three dimensions of bias: perceptual, behavioural, and overall unconscious bias. While these dimensions are closely linked, their impact is not equal. The data shows that behavioural bias is the strongest predictor of overall leadership bias. To put it simply:

- **Perceptual bias** influences how leaders interpret people
- **Behavioural bias** determines how leaders act toward them

And it is those actions that shape employee experience and organisational outcomes.

How Bias Quietly Shapes Leadership Decisions

Bias in Caribbean organisations rarely appears as overt discrimination. Instead, it is embedded in everyday leadership behaviour—often unnoticed because it presents itself as reasonable judgment.

It influences:

- Who is trusted with responsibility
- Who is considered “ready” for advancement
- Who receives developmental feedback versus corrective feedback
- Who is included—or excluded—from opportunity

Individually, these decisions may seem minor. Collectively, they create consistent patterns that shape careers, engagement, and performance.

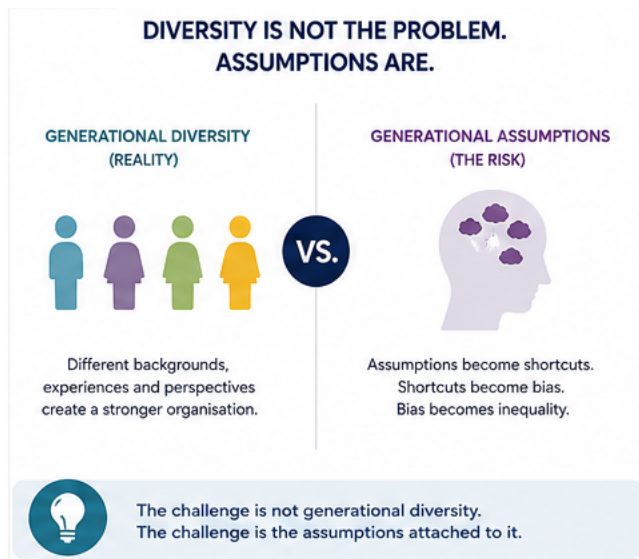
The Multigenerational Trap

Generational frameworks are often used as a tool for understanding workplace dynamics. However, your research reinforces a critical distinction:

The challenge is not generational diversity—it is the assumptions attached to it.

When leaders rely on generational shortcuts, they risk substituting perception for evidence. This can result in:

- Older employees being overlooked for innovation or transformation work
- Younger employees being perceived as lacking commitment or readiness
- Leadership decisions being guided by expectation rather than performance



What emerges is not inclusion, but **predictable patterns of bias operating under the guise of logic.**

Why Caribbean Organisations Are Especially Vulnerable

The Caribbean context introduces unique organisational dynamics that can allow behavioural bias to persist. Workplaces often operate within:

- Strong interpersonal cultures
- Informal decision-making structures
- Deep respect for hierarchy and tenure

These characteristics strengthen relationships—but can also reduce the likelihood that leadership behaviour is questioned or examined. As a result, bias becomes:

- Normalised
- Embedded
- Difficult to detect

Why Awareness Training Falls Short

Many organisations have responded to bias through training and awareness initiatives. While these efforts are important, they are often insufficient. Awareness targets perception. But behaviour is shaped by:

- Systems

- Habits
- Incentives
- Accountability

Without addressing these elements, leaders may leave training sessions informed—but continue to operate in ways that reinforce bias. This explains why organisations often see:

- Increased awareness
- But limited behavioural change

From Insight to Action: Where Organisations Should Focus

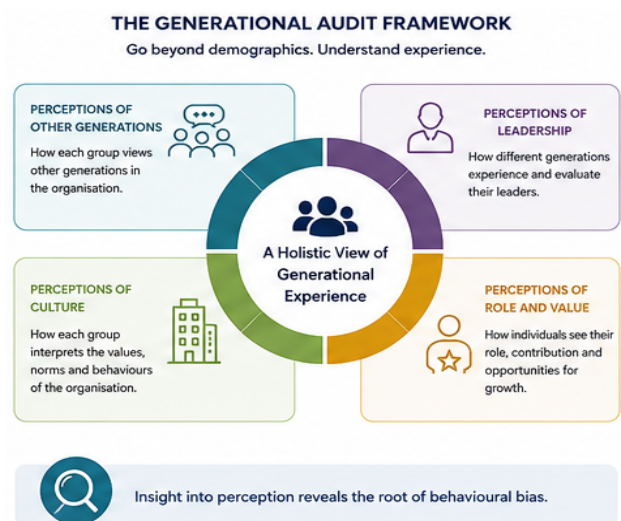
Addressing bias requires a shift from general awareness to targeted intervention. Organisations must focus on the specific points where perception becomes behaviour.

1. Conduct a Generational Audit That Goes Beyond Demographics

Most organisations can describe their workforce by age group. Far fewer understand how those groups experience the organisation.

A meaningful generational audit should examine:

- How employees perceive other generations
- How leadership behaviour is experienced across cohorts
- How organisational culture is interpreted at different levels
- How individuals see their role, value, and opportunity



This approach surfaces the **perceptual layer of bias**—the narratives that shape behaviour but often remain unspoken.

2. Review High-Impact Processes to Identify Where Bias Operates as “Logic”

Bias is rarely obvious. It is often embedded in processes and justified through reasoning that appears sound. Organisations should conduct a structured review of high-impact processes, including:

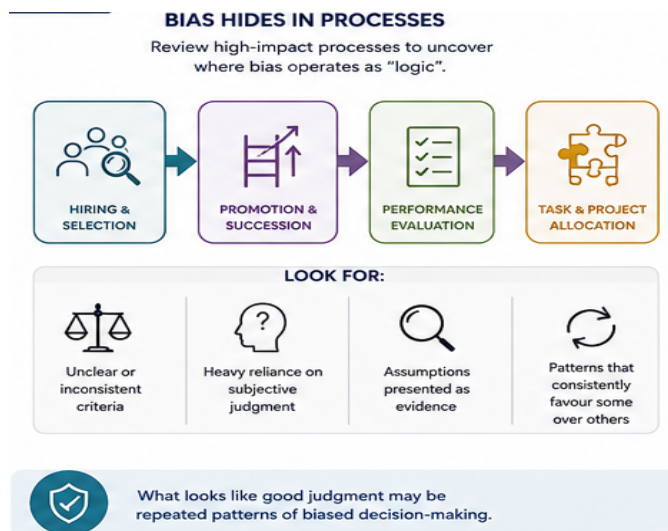
- Hiring and selection
- Promotion and succession
- Performance evaluation
- Task allocation and project assignment

The objective is to identify where:

- Criteria are unclear or inconsistently applied

- Decisions rely heavily on subjective judgment
- Assumptions are presented as evidence

In many cases, what appears to be “good judgment” is simply **repeated patterns of biased decision-making**.



3. Retrain Leaders with a Focus on Behavioural Change and Reinforcement

If behavioural bias drives organisational outcomes, then leadership development must focus on behaviour—not just awareness. This requires moving beyond one-time interventions toward sustained development. Effective retraining should enable leaders to:

- Recognise bias in real-time decisions
- Practise alternative leadership behaviours
- Build consistency in how they engage and evaluate others

To support this, organisations must embed:

- **Coaching**, to guide real-time application
- **Mentorship**, to reinforce expectations
- **Feedback mechanisms**, to sustain improvement



Behavioural change is not achieved through insight alone—it is developed through **practice, reinforcement, and accountability**.

What This Means for Leadership Strategy

This research reframes how organisations should approach bias. It is not simply a matter of changing how leaders think. It is about redesigning how leadership operates. This means:

- Shifting from awareness to action
- From intention to execution
- From individual mindset to organisational systems

Conclusion: The Real Work of Inclusive Leadership

Caribbean organisations do not lack awareness of bias. What they often lack are the structures needed to interrupt it. The path forward is clear:

- Design decision-making processes that reduce bias
- Equip leaders to act differently, not just think differently
- Reinforce inclusive behaviour through systems and accountability

Ultimately, inclusion is not defined by what leaders believe. It is defined by what leaders consistently do.

About the Author

Dana Hayes-Burke is a Business and Leadership Strategist with over a decade of experience supporting Caribbean organisations in leadership development, strategic planning, and workforce transformation. Through DHB Vision Strategists, she helps organisations build inclusive, high-performing leadership systems grounded in behavioural change.

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