

How do stereotypes and bias affect leadership abilities?

Many companies have leadership programmes; however, very few have a scheme as intense as Leadership DNA. Designed off the back of Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg's recent book decrying sexism in the workplace, two female executives decided to create something which encouraged exploration of the often unspoken aspects of personal leadership.

Emma Thomas, Head of Sales at Block and Brokers and Amanda Childs, Head of Business & Customer Excellence at Siemens Financial Services in the UK, believe that unconscious bias is holding back innovative companies.

Through general conversation the two women realised that there was a need to create an open dialogue on many of the topics raised within Sheryl Sandberg's book, particularly the aspect of unconscious bias (how your background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context impact your decisions and actions without you realising), which affects everyone.

The pair went on to comment on how they shared a desire to create a more informal platform to discuss a range of leadership subjects. They wanted to tackle these topics in a different way to engender engagement and support personal leadership.

In a traditional 'workplace' setting, it can be difficult to talk about leadership and some of the more sensitive, personal aspects which affect us all. The two wanted a platform that would cut through hierarchy and bias whilst tackling these issues in an open way and enabling everyone at all levels of our business to share their views.

As subtle as this point may seem, conversations for leaders can be closed and hidden away from the broader community. Challenging this barrier played an important role in creating the successful forum it has now become.

Over the years, the forum has grown through word of mouth, broadening to other companies within the asset finance sector. The two women believe that the programme is unique, in that it brings together people from across the industry to discuss these issues.