

Unconscious Bias in Property Management Organisations (PMOs): Identifying Bias Trends and Mitigation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates unconscious bias in Property Management Organisations (PMOs) in Selangor, focusing on its presence in recruitment, tenant selection, vendor engagement, and service delivery. The research aims to identify common bias types and evaluate effective mitigation strategies. Using convenience sampling, data were gathered through questionnaires from 70 PMO personnels, including managers, executives, and administrative staff. Descriptive analysis and the Relative Importance Index (RII) were used to rank prevalent biases and assess the perceived importance of mitigation strategies. Centrality Bias and Availability Bias emerged as the most common, especially in recruitment and tenant selection. Fostering an inclusive workplace culture and updating recruitment criteria were identified as the most effective mitigation strategies. Although limited to a single region, the study offers practical insights for promoting fairer and more inclusive decision-making in PMOs.

Keywords: decision making, property management organisations, unconscious bias

INTRODUCTION

Property management (PM) involves the administration, operation, and maintenance of real estate assets, including residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use developments. In Malaysia, PM is defined under the Valuers, Appraisers, and Estate Agents Act 1981 (Act 242) as the management and control of properties on behalf of owners for a fee. Property Management Organisations (PMOs) are responsible for ensuring the functionality, value, and profitability of properties while aligning with ethical and regulatory standards. Their scope includes financial planning, tenancy and vendor coordination, administrative oversight, and customer service (Malaysian Property Management Standard, 2016).

Due to the human-centred nature of PM, where decisions often rely on professional judgment, interpersonal interactions, and subjective evaluation, unconscious bias can significantly affect outcomes

(Au-Young et al., 2024; Eccles, 2023). This bias may influence recruitment, tenant selection, vendor engagement, and service delivery, often leading to unintended discrimination, reduced diversity, and compromised fairness (Whitfield et al., 2023; Oyedeki, 2022; Wong, 2024). Despite PM's reliance on human discretion, awareness and mitigation of unconscious bias remain limited, raising concerns about organisational equity and performance.

While unconscious bias is widely studied in organisational behaviour (OB) and human resource management (HRM) (Storm et al., 2023), limited research addresses how these biases manifest in PMOs. Much of PM-related decision-making research remains data-driven, often overlooking the social and behavioural dimensions that shape managerial choices (Muntwiler et al., 2025; Fasolo et al., 2024).

This study aims to fill this gap by identifying prevalent types of unconscious bias in PMOs, focusing on recruitment, tenant selection, vendor engagement, and service delivery, and to propose mitigation strategies. A quantitative approach is used to support fairer, more transparent, and effective decision-making in the property management sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective PM relies on rational decision-making processes that impact various aspects of real estate operations. The reliance on human decisions will open the potential for unconscious biases, which can influence key managerial selection in ways that may not always align with fairness, efficiency, or ethical best practices. This section reviews the existing literature on decision-making in PMOs, types of unconscious bias in property management, and the strategies available to mitigate these biases.

Decision-Making in Property Management Organisation

Property management integrates processes in an organisation to provide and develop professional management services for properties that are or will be permanently intertwined in the real estate portfolio (Bogenstätter, 2023). The decision-making process might affect the value, profitability, and utility of real estate assets. Good decisions will help to guarantee operational effectiveness, tenant satisfaction, and ethical and legal compliance. In PMOs, decision-making consists of numerous important aspects as described in Table 1:

Table 1: Important Aspects in Decision-Making

Aspect	Description	References
Recruitment	A well-organised hiring procedure encourages workplace diversity and helps to choose ethical and competent staff members.	Afzal et al. (2023); Abbasi et al. (2020); Adams, (2020).
Tenant Selection	Evaluating prospective tenants is important to ensure they can meet lease obligations. A balanced tenant mix, based on financial soundness and rental history, helps maintain steady income, minimize risks, and uphold property stability.	Olanrewaju & Amietsenwu (2023); Ugonabo (2023); Marquez et al. (2022).
Vendor Relationship	Maintaining a property requires reliable vendors for operations, security, and repairs. Property managers assess them based on cost, quality, and dependability to ensure efficient service delivery.	Paramita et al. (2023); Saleh et al. (2023); Alhamda et al. (2022).
Service Delivery	Managing tenant requests, tenant responses, maintenance plans, and customer service guarantees a seamless running of the property. A methodical strategy guarantees equitable service allocation, quick resolution of problems, and general tenant satisfaction.	Latitha et al. (2022); Shen et al. (2021); Ojekalu et al. (2019).

Although most organisations have a structured evaluation process and standard, the property management decision-making involves various cognitive factors and external influences that might

impact these decisions. One of the factors is unconscious bias, which can shape hiring practices, tenant approvals, vendor selections, and service delivery in ways that may not always be intentional. The following section explores the unconscious bias in property management and its implications for fair and effective decision-making.

Unconscious Bias in Property Management

Unconscious bias is also known as implicit bias. Mazarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald used the phrase originally in 1995 in their article on implicit social cognition (Suveren, 2022). They argued that unconscious associations and judgments greatly influenced social behaviour. Usually, the implicit attitude points at a particular social group, which is why individuals sometimes attach specific traits to a given group. However, this kind of act is not intentional and controllable (Sander et al., 2020).

Unconscious bias exists in various ways and can significantly impact decision-making in organisations, including Property Management Organisations (PMOs). These biases influence decision-making, often leading to unintended favouritism, discrimination, or inconsistencies in management operations. The following are common types of unconscious bias relevant to the property management industry.

Table 2: Types of Unconscious Bias

Types of unconscious bias		References
Affinity	Individuals favour people who share similar backgrounds, values or beliefs.	Westover (2024); Heidari et al. (2023); Suveren (2022)
Halo Effect	A single positive characteristic, such as appearance and attractiveness, influences overall perception and leads to biased decision-making.	Suveren, (2022); Faucher (2016)
Confirmation	Tendency to search or interpret information in a way that confirms pre-existing beliefs, while ignoring evidence that contradicts them.	Sutton (2024); Peters (2022); Matthias and Megan (2020).
Gender	This kind of bias may be reflected in recruitment, promotion, salary, job assignment, working environment, and so on.	Benco (2024); Wang (2024); Muhammad Sauqi et al. (2021).
Centrality	Tendency to rate everyone as average, especially in staff performance reviews, vendor evaluations, and tenant satisfaction surveys.	Mursita et al. (2022); Trapp I. & Trapp R. (2019).
Availability	Tendency to rely on recent or easily recalled information when making decisions rather than considering all relevant data.	Nizar et al. (2024); Sumantri et al. (2024).
Anchoring	Results from an initial piece of information serve as a benchmark for all later decisions, even in cases when the information is useless or outdated.	Węgrzyn & Julia Kuta (2024).

Understanding the varieties of unconscious bias in property management shows how they can subtly affect recruiting, tenant selection, vendor relationships, and service delivery, resulting in unintended partiality, injustices, or inefficiencies. PMOs must plan mitigation strategies to minimise bias in critical decision-making areas. The following section discusses unconscious bias mitigation strategies to ensure substantive and sustainable property management improvements.

Mitigation Strategies for Unconscious Bias in Property Management

Although biases cannot be eliminated, evidence-based interventions can greatly reduce its effect on decision-making. These strategies seek to produce a more inclusive and performance-oriented property management system.

Table 3: Mitigation Strategies for Unconscious Bias

Mitigation Strategies		References
Training and Awareness Program	Enables staff members and decision-makers to become aware of unconscious bias. Through this training, individuals may identify and handle latent preferences.	Gopal et al. (2021)
Fair and Inclusive Hiring Practice	Standardised hiring methods that guarantee all candidates are assessed on merit rather than subjective preferences help to lower bias in recruiting and promotions. For example, focusing on essential skills and competencies, diverse hiring panels, AI-enabled recruiting, and scoring rubrics.	Davidson et al. (2024); Carness (2023); Pennington et al. (2022); Gopal et al. (2021)
Cultural Competency Development	PMOs must be culturally competent if they want to encourage workplace diversity and output. This entails encouraging a culture of diversity, which enhances creativity by incorporating various perspectives and making staff members feel valued and motivated to participate.	Carness (2023); Pennington et al. (2022); Gopal et al. (2021)
Bias Reduction in Workplace Culture	Find and eliminate bias in daily operations and policies to guarantee that decisions are based on merit instead of illogical preferences. For example, regular bias audits, hiring, and performance evaluation strategies.	Hagiwara et al. (2020); Hinds et al. (2019)

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study employed a quantitative approach. Figure 1 shows the research methodology flowchart that is applied in this research.

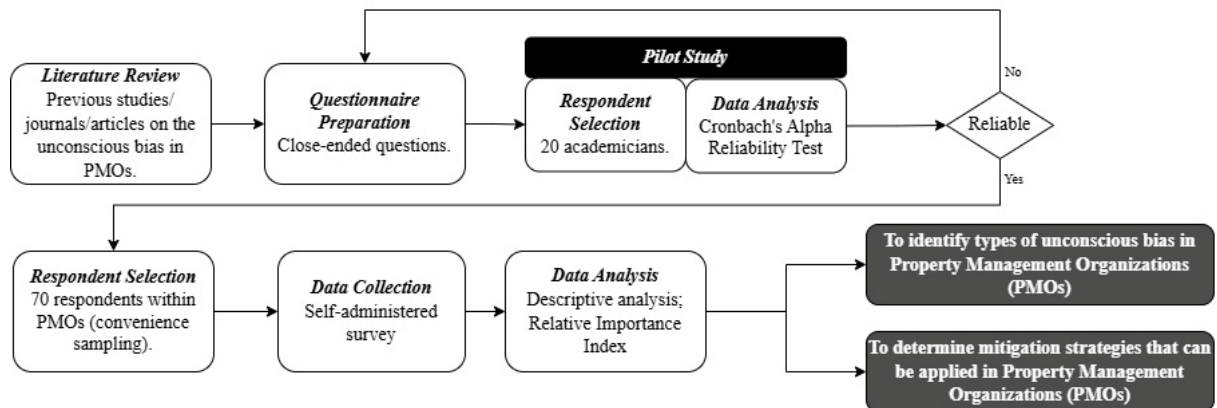


Figure 1: Research Methodology Flowchart (Source: Authors, 2025)

This study employed a quantitative research approach, beginning with a review of existing literature, including theses, journals, and books, to identify the types of unconscious bias and corresponding mitigation strategies relevant to Property Management Organisations (PMOs). Based on the findings, a structured questionnaire was developed, comprising three sections: demographic profile, types of unconscious bias, and mitigation strategies, utilising closed-ended questions through a 5-point Likert Scale and Multiple Choice (Single Answer) formats. The following is the questionnaire design format:

Table 4: Example of Questionnaire Design

Section	Question Type	Question	
B	5-Likert Scale	In our organisation, property managers tend to build stronger working relationships with those who have similar backgrounds or interests.	1 - Strongly Disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly Agree

	Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)	In which of the following areas do you believe property managers are most likely to favour those who have similar backgrounds or interests?	1 – Recruiting; 2 - Tenant Selection; 3 – Vendor Relationship; 4 – Service Delivery
C	5-Likert Scale	The organisation should provide structured training on unconscious bias for employees and decision-makers.	1 - Strongly Disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - Neutral; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly Agree

A pilot study involving 20 property management academicians was conducted to assess the questionnaire's reliability, achieving Cronbach's alpha values of 0.753 (Section B) and 0.833 (Section C), indicating acceptable internal consistency as the minimum acceptable value for Cronbach's Alpha is 0.7 from the previous study (Vivian et al., 2023; Hajizadeh et al., 2022). Subsequently, the main survey used convenience sampling targeting individuals from active PMOs in Selangor, yielding 70 completed responses. As the total number of active PMOs in the area is not publicly available, this sampling technique was adopted to reach accessible and willing respondents. This approach is common in exploratory social research where the population is undefined or difficult to enumerate (Boateng et al., 2018). Data collection was carried out through self-administered surveys and the collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics for MCQs and the Relative Importance Index (RII) to determine the perceived significance of different types of unconscious bias and the effectiveness of proposed mitigation strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on the types of unconscious bias and mitigation strategies in Property Management Organisations (PMOs). The analysis focuses on seven types of biases and the mitigating strategies in PMOs. This study offers a whole picture of how PMOs could reduce bias-related risks and improve ethical decision-making by examining both the biases and their solutions. The study gathered responses from a total of 70 participants working in the property management sector in the Shah Alam area. The demographic characteristics focused on gender, working experience, and job positions.

Table 5: Demographics of Respondents

Category	Sub-category	Percentage	Category	Sub-category	Percentage
Gender	Male	45.7	Job Position	Property/ Building Manager	22.9
	Female	54.3		Property/ Building Executive	35.7
Working Experience	< 1 year	14.3		Others (Admin, Supervisor, Management Committee)	41.4
	1-5 years	50.0			
	6-10 years	32.9			
	> 10 years	2.9			

Types of Unconscious Bias

The findings in Table 6 expose the extent of unconscious bias in PMOs, especially in important areas of decision-making such as recruiting, tenant selection, vendor relationships, and service delivery. The study of seven types of unconscious bias - Affinity Bias, Halo Effect Bias, Confirmation Bias, Gender Bias, Centrality Bias, Availability Bias, and Anchoring Bias, showcases how these biases affect workplace diversity, justice, and efficiency.

Table 6: Analysis of Unconscious Bias Types in Property Management Organisations (PMOs)

Types of Unconscious Bias	Description	RII Value	Rank	Most Affected Key PM Function (%)
Affinity Bias	Prefer to have a similar background, interests, or experience traits.	0.726	6	Recruiting (70%)
Halo Effect Bias	A single positive trait may overshadow a complete evaluation of the actual qualifications.	0.711	7	Service Delivery (56%)
Confirmation Bias	Seek or favour information that aligns with pre-existing views about the other person, ignoring contradictory evidence.	0.771	3	Tenant Selection (64%)
Gender Bias	Selection is influenced by gender-related stereotypes.	0.731	5	Recruiting (80%)
Centrality Bias	Favour the person who fits a "standard" or expected profile rather than assessing unique strengths or potential contributions.	0.800	1	Recruiting (76%)
Availability Bias	Recent interactions with candidates are causing managers to overlook equally qualified options from the earliest assessment.	0.774	2	Tenant Selection (64%)
Anchoring Bias	The tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information received when making decisions. (The first candidate becomes the reference point for comparison)	0.769	4	Vendor Relationship (70%)

Based on Table 6, Centrality Bias was identified as a major influence in recruitment, where candidates were evaluated based on an "average" profile rather than individual strengths. This trend may continue into performance appraisals, where managers avoid extreme ratings (Mursita et al., 2022), limiting early-career professionals' advancement, as reflected by the many respondents with 1–5 years of experience. Tenant selection was significantly impacted by Availability and Confirmation Biases. Managers often relied on recent experiences or prior assumptions, leading to unintentional discrimination. Negative past tenant encounters, as noted by Oyediji (2022), heavily shaped selection outcomes, while Confirmation Bias reinforced initial judgments (Casad and Luebering, 2025). Anchoring Bias was a concern in vendor selection, where first impressions of vendors skewed subsequent evaluations, risking long-term service quality issues. Gender Bias, although lower-ranked, continued to affect hiring decisions, with women facing lingering stereotypes that limit leadership opportunities despite diversity initiatives (Benco, 2024). Affinity Bias also influenced recruitment, favouring candidates with similar backgrounds and reducing organisational diversity, innovation, and potentially harming reputation (Westover, 2024). Lastly, the Halo Effect was found to skew service delivery, where tenants or vendors were perceived positively based on a single trait, received preferential treatment, risking service inconsistencies and stakeholder dissatisfaction (Suveren, 2024).

Mitigating Strategies

Effective strategies must be implemented to reduce the bias impact on the PMO's decision-making and performance. This section discusses mitigation strategies to ensure that PMOs operate with fairness, transparency, and efficiency. Table 7 shows the analysis of mitigation strategies.

Table 7: Analysis of Mitigation Strategies

Description	RII Value	Rank
Training and Awareness Program		
Providing structured training on unconscious bias for employees and decision-makers	0.783	6
Encouraging leadership development to promote bias-free decision-making	0.697	8
Fair and Inclusive Hiring Practices		
Implementing structured policies and frameworks to reduce bias in hiring and promotions	0.789	5

Regularly updating recruitment and promotion criteria to enhance workplace diversity	0.817	2
Cultural Competency Development		
Fostering an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity and innovation	0.829	1
Developing cross-cultural awareness to improve respectful interactions and fair treatment	0.814	3
Bias Reduction in Workplace Culture		
Identifying and addressing unconscious bias in daily operations and policies	0.729	7
Encouraging continuous learning and accountability to sustain an inclusive work environment	0.814	3

The findings identified four key strategies as most effective in reducing unconscious bias in PMOs: i) fostering an inclusive workplace culture, ii) updating recruitment and promotion criteria, iii) developing cross-cultural awareness, and iv) encouraging continuous learning and accountability. Although training and awareness programs ranked lower, respectively, they are essential to supporting the success of these strategies over time. Fostering an inclusive workplace culture ranked highest, emphasising the importance of promoting equity and diversity across policies, leadership expectations, and performance evaluations. This approach directly mitigates the Affinity Bias, Halo Effect, and Gender Bias by encouraging objective decision-making. Training and awareness initiatives are crucial in embedding inclusivity into daily practices. The second-ranked strategy involves regularly updating recruitment and promotion criteria; Centrality Bias, Affinity Bias, and Gender Bias were commonly associated with the hiring processes. Tools such as blind resume screening, standardised interviews, and competency-based assessments can ensure decisions prioritise skills and diverse perspectives. Regular bias-awareness training further enhances the effectiveness of these methods. Developing cross-cultural awareness and promoting continuous learning and accountability were equally ranked third. Addressing unconscious bias requires ongoing education in cultural competency and fair leadership, which is reinforced through structured feedback, leadership accountability measures, and regular performance evaluations. These initiatives must be continuously reviewed and refined to sustain a positive organisational culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research clarifies the existence of unconscious bias in Selangor's Property Management Organisations (PMOs), pointing out typical forms of bias and mitigation strategies for the organisation. Although the results are important, the study is constrained by its concentration on PMOs in Selangor, which might not fairly depict the larger sector. Nonetheless, the study provides insights for PMOs to identify and address unconscious bias, therefore fostering a more inclusive and productive workplace. Future studies might look at the long-term effects of bias-reducing techniques and include a bigger, more varied collection of PMOs from more locations. Further understanding of its wider consequences on the sector would come from looking at how unconscious bias influences tenant satisfaction and general performance.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Zainol, N.N. conceptualised the study, developed the research design and conducted the survey. Isa, M. and Sulaiman, M.A. performed the data analysis. Abdullah Hashim, H., contributed to the interpretation of findings. Sukereman, A.S., led the manuscript drafting. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript and contributed to its refinement and final approval.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication, nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity, and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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