



Cognizant’s Unconscious Bias at Work Uses Multi-Faceted Approach

Cognizant

Best Unique or Innovative Learning and Development Program

December 2018



Company Background



Cognizant

Headquarters	Teaneck, New Jersey
Year Founded	1994
Revenue	\$14.81 billion (FY17)
Employees	260,000
Global Scale (Regions that you operate in or provide services to)	25,000-plus projects in 40-plus countries, 25-plus regional sales offices and 75-plus global delivery/operations centers in over 16 countries across four continents.
Customers/Output, etc. (Key customers and services offered)	950-plus active clients across healthcare, life sciences, insurance, banking, financial services, manufacturing, logistics, retail, travel, hospitality, information, media, entertainment, technology, communications, energy and utilities.
Industry	IT, ITES and consulting
Stock Symbol	NASDAQ: CTSH
Website	www.cognizant.com



Budget and Timeframe

Number of (HR, Learning, Talent) employees involved with the implementation?	Ten learning professionals, including instructional designers, graphic designers, programmers and project managers.
Number of Operations or Subject Matter Expert employees involved with the implementation?	5
Timeframe to implement	Eight to nine months.
Start date of the program	April 2017

Business Conditions and Business Needs

2017 was truly the Year of the Woman. Across the globe, in industries, corporations, media and entertainment houses, the shape of power seemed to be shifting and swelling from a trickle, to a rivulet, to a mighty torrent — the force of which became hard to deny.

Here are some of the momentous events that reminded the world that the time was up for deep-rooted biases:

Figure 1: 2017 Momentous Events



Source: Cognizant

The rallying cries for women empowerment were being heard in the corridors of corporates and institutions. Never before had the need for eradication of biases and an aim to establish equality been felt so strongly. The women’s empowerment principles (WEPs) which are based on concrete business practices inspired global corporates to tailor existing policies and programs — or establish new ones — to realize women’s empowerment. To date, 1,800 companies have signed onto the WEPs.



In Cognizant, the need for diversity inclusion and women empowerment was gathering force. Poised at a pivotal time, the talent force was increasingly becoming future-ready to address complex requirements for its global customer base.

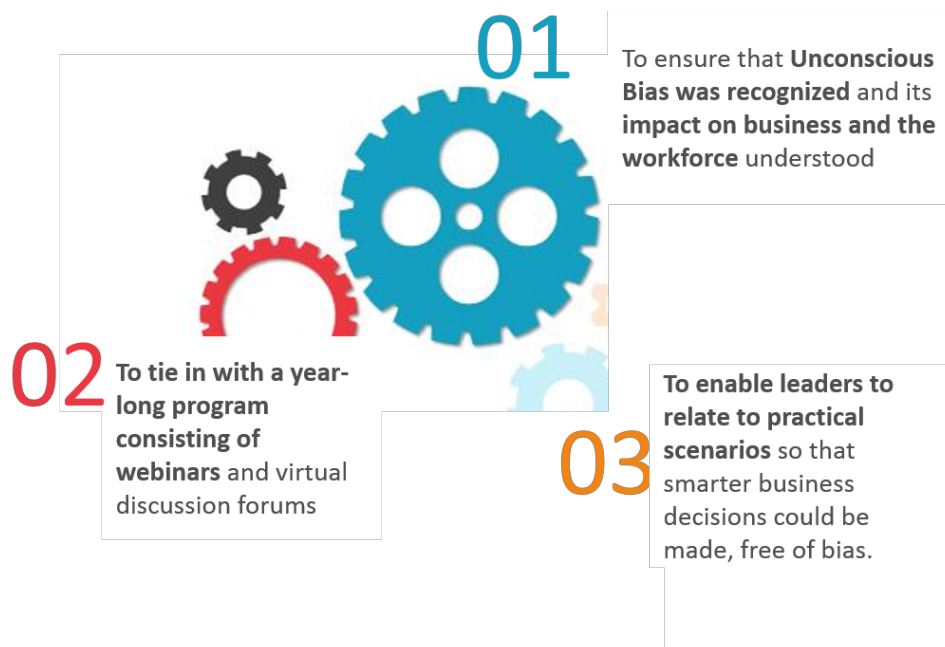
“As the world becomes more tech intensive, as tech becomes more complex and the ecosystem and range of available tech broadens, the need for companies like ours in advising our clients on the right technology will only become more critical,” Cognizant CEO **Francisco D’Souza** said in a *Forbes* 2017 interview.

This meant that top talent needed to be hired and retained and be required to represent a diverse and gender-equal workforce that mirrored client compositions. Workplace decisions and the vocabulary of business dialogues needed to be fair and free of biases.

With this aim, Cognizant’s global leadership development, an exclusive body dedicated to the development and retention of executive talent, reached out to the digital learning team. The need was to create an awareness and learning program around unconscious bias in the workplace. The target audience would consist of 20,000-plus senior leaders who were engaged in business decisions at the workplace.

The requirements were as follows:

Figure 2: Learning Program Requirements

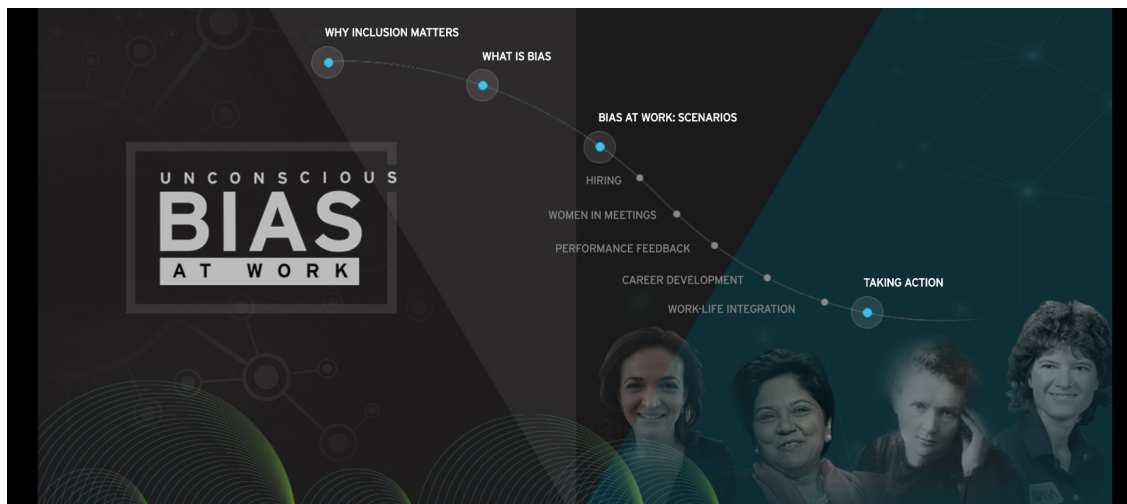


Source: Cognizant



The digital learning team proposed to address this by designing an innovative, multi-media-rich digital program which would contain practical workplace scenarios to engage the learners. Over the next few months, diversity experts teamed up with digital learning architects. Concepts and messaging were fine-tuned with the help of thought leaders and academicians. Visual, technical and instructional designers collaborated on learning content, rich graphics, live action films and programming frameworks. Eventually, a unique digital roadmap emerged which captured the essence of the organization-wide goals around diversity and unconscious bias.

Figure 3: The Unconscious Bias at Work: Digital Roadmap



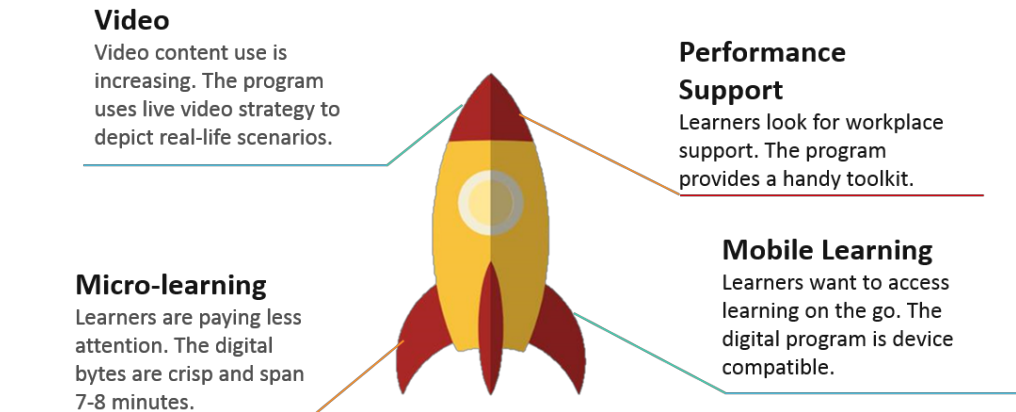
Source: Cognizant

Overview

The Unconscious Bias at Work program provided key messaging around the business goals to achieve a bias-free culture. This was accomplished through a series of virtual webinars led by industry thought leaders who teamed up with diversity experts within Cognizant. The webinars addressed global audiences and encouraged live discussion forums.

The complementing digital interactive learning program for Unconscious Bias at Work aimed to modernize the learning experience. These were a few of the key learning trends of 2017 that influenced the macro-design of the digital interactive program:

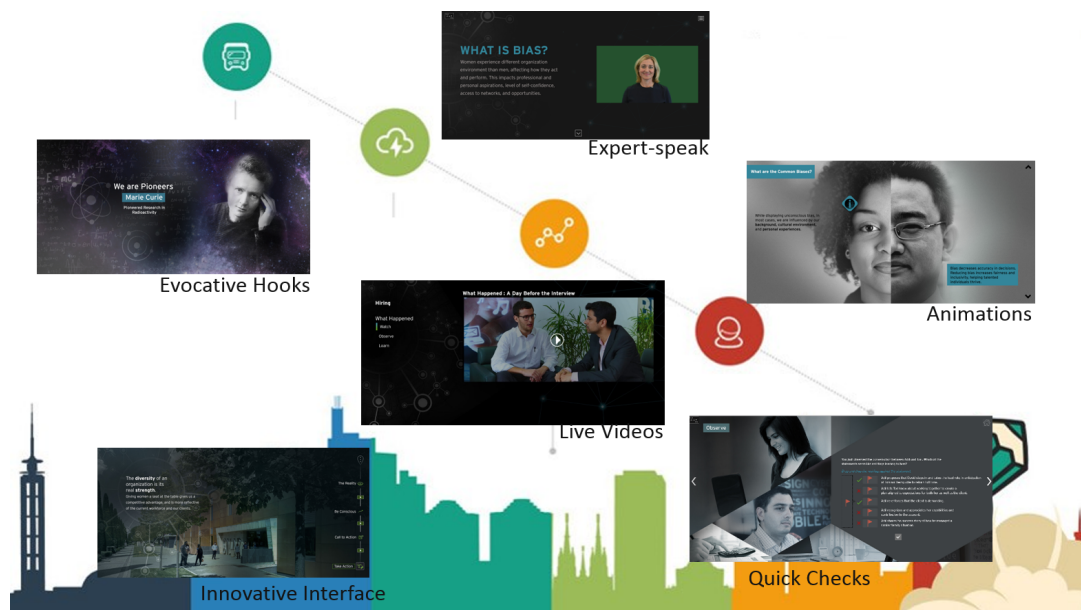
Figure 4: A Snapshot of the Macro-Design Influenced by Modern Learning Trends



Source: Cognizant

The digital roadmap used minimal, crisp text, expert-speak, charts, infographics and videos to illustrate concepts and scenarios and a rich, engaging visual look and feel to complement the immersive experience. Adequate learner interactions, quick checks and practical toolkits ensured that the learning was carried forward into the workplace. The snapshot below illustrates the varied elements:

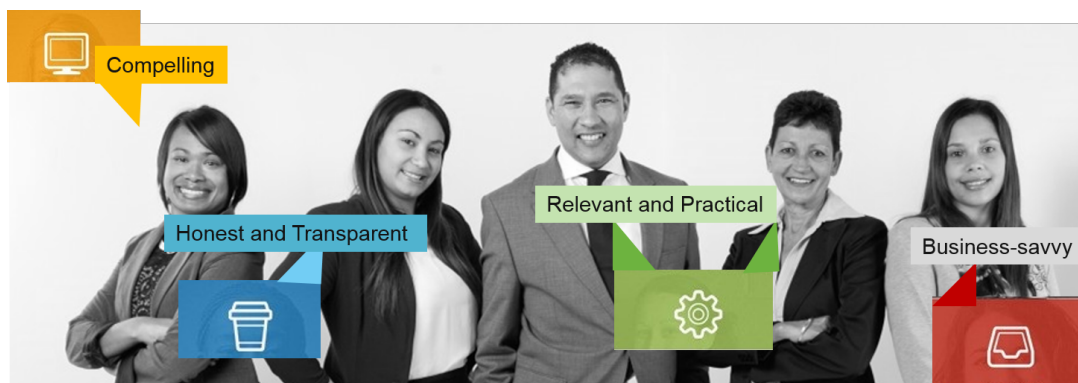
Figure 5: Digital Roadmap Elements



Source: Cognizant

“This is us,” exclaimed one of the senior leaders from the people function and over the next weeks her sentiment was echoed by the learner audience. The impact of the program was felt throughout the organization, across business units, functions, hierarchies, those who lead and those who were being led. The conclusion was unanimous:

Figure 6: Learner Audience Response



Source: Cognizant

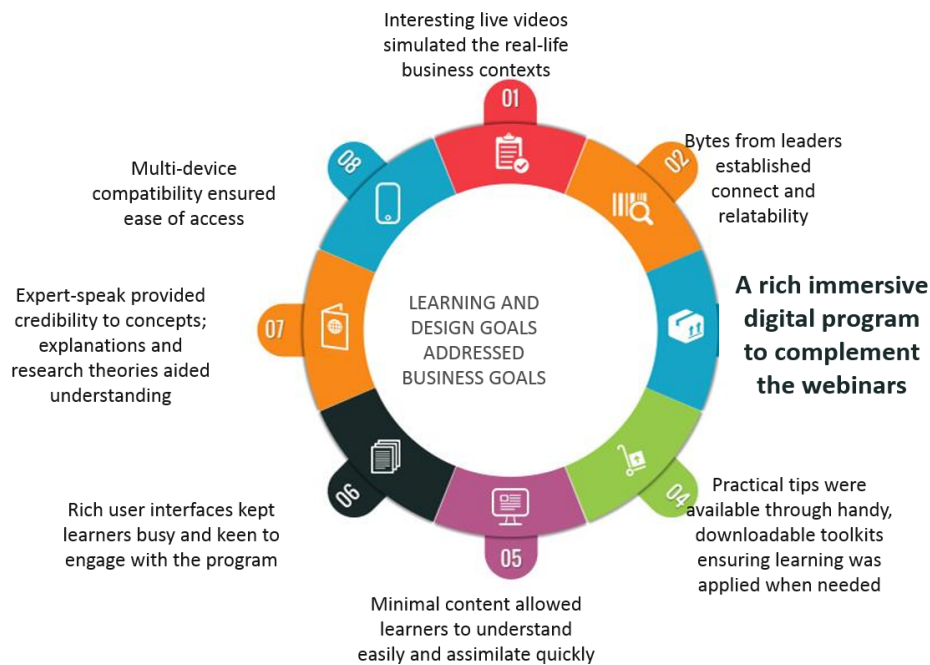
The organizational goals were to grow leaders faster than the business and enable individuals to become more responsible to make smart business decisions.

Leaders and decision-makers would need to ensure that talent was hired, retained and governed into being productive. To enable this, unconscious bias would need to be prevented from coloring workplace decisions while:

- Hiring talent;
- Conducting a performance appraisal;
- Encouraging an expectant mother;
- Including women in meetings; and
- While doing a career development discussion.

Learning goals included the understanding and awareness of bias and the ways it could affect these workplace interactions and how people make decisions. Learners later would need to apply this understanding while making smart business decisions. The snapshot below illustrates how the business goals were addressed through the learning and design goals of the program:

Figure 7: Learning and Design Goals Addressed Business Goals



Source: Cognizant

Design of the Program

A few key considerations governed the development strategy of the program. These included the target audience profile, their habits and preferences, the overall learning goals and the best-fit learning strategies that would work in this context.

The content would need to be credible — grounded in reality and supported by expert research — and be engaging enough to interest learners to complete it. The development strategy also would need to factor in the need for easy access and the ability to cover a large, diverse and global workforce.

Figure 8: The Roadmap of the Overall Development of the Program



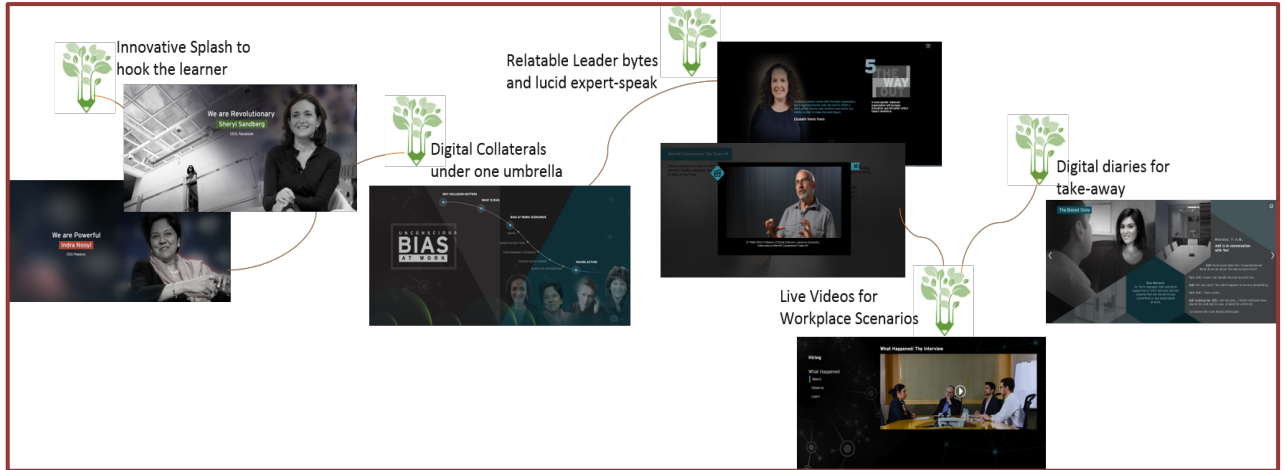
Source: Cognizant

“This is a phenomenal program,” said a senior talent management leader. “In a class apart,” said a busy delivery leader who usually did not like to spend time on training away from his busy schedule. “I found myself wanting to go through it; I did not feel bored,” said a senior learning architect. What were some of the reasons behind the buzz that had built around the Unconscious Bias at Work program?

The design contained an immersive mix of interactive nuggets, digital diaries, video-based scenarios, animations, graphic novel pages, toolkits and leader bites, all seamlessly woven under one umbrella. The look and feel was dramatic, rich and in alignment with the serious subject matter. Short, crisp content was focused on practical applications to workplace situations related to:

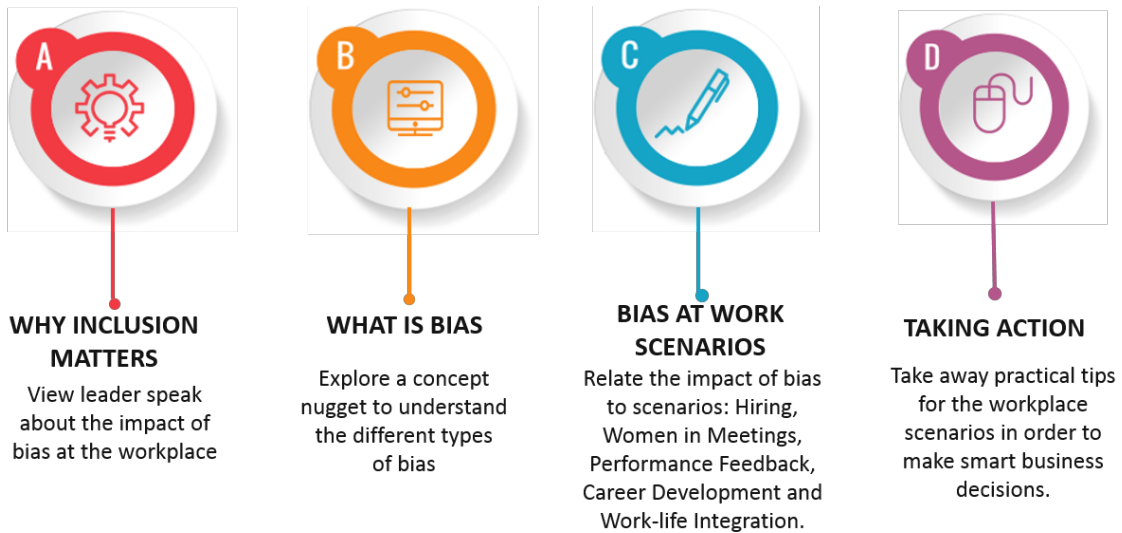
- Hiring;
- Women in meeting;
- Career development;
- Performance Feedback; and
- Work-life integration.

Figure 9: Program Design Tools



Source: Cognizant

Figure 10: Path Learners Could Follow

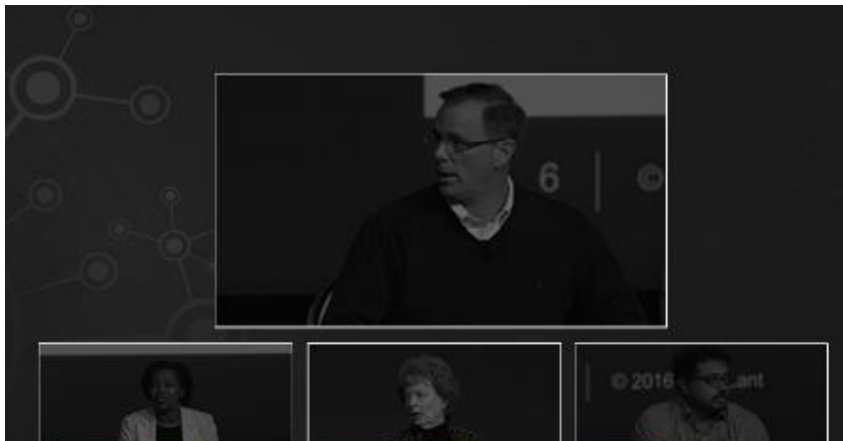


Source: Cognizant



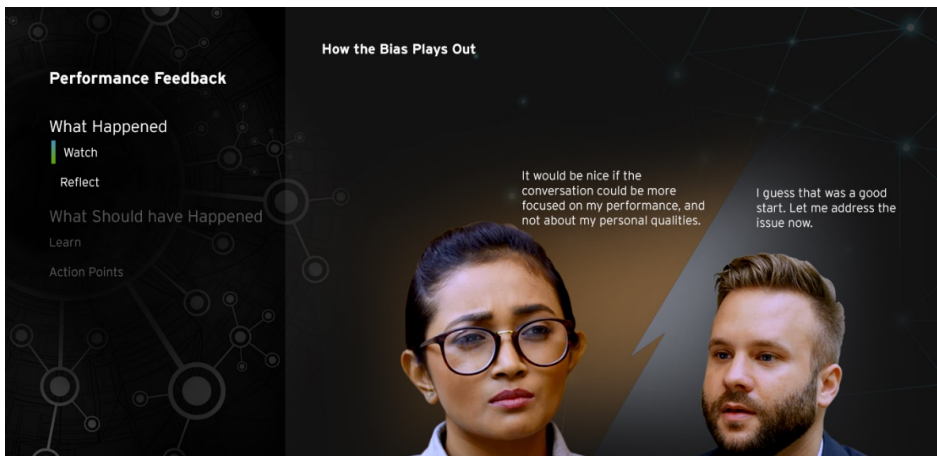
A few unique design elements are listed below:

Figure 11: Leader Messages Urging Individuals to Act on Removing Unconscious Bias



Source: Cognizant

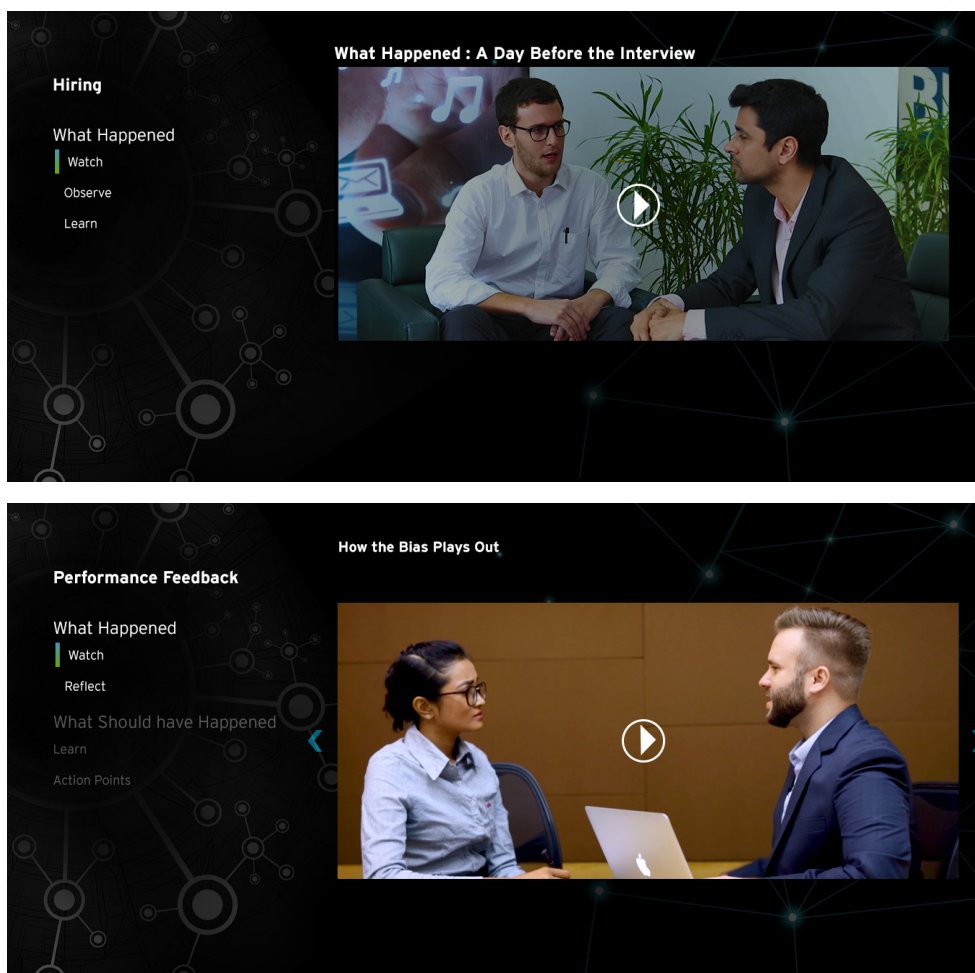
Figure 12: Engaging Visual Interfaces and Minimal Content to Immerse the Learner



Source: Cognizant

- Live video strategies to depict real-life scenarios. Each workplace situation was covered through a small plot which showed a biased situation.

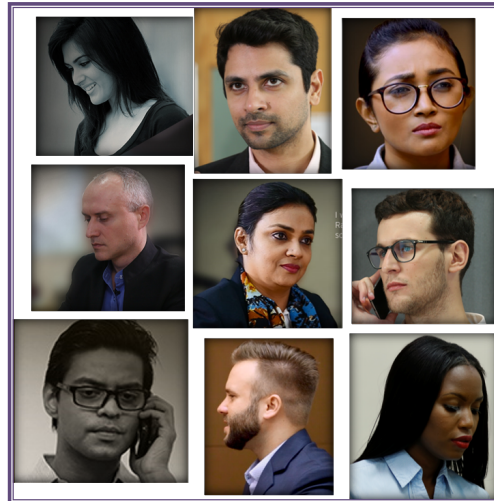
Figure 13: Real-Life Scenario Videos



Source: Cognizant

- A diverse cast of characters were used to mirror the geographically spread and culturally diverse workforce:

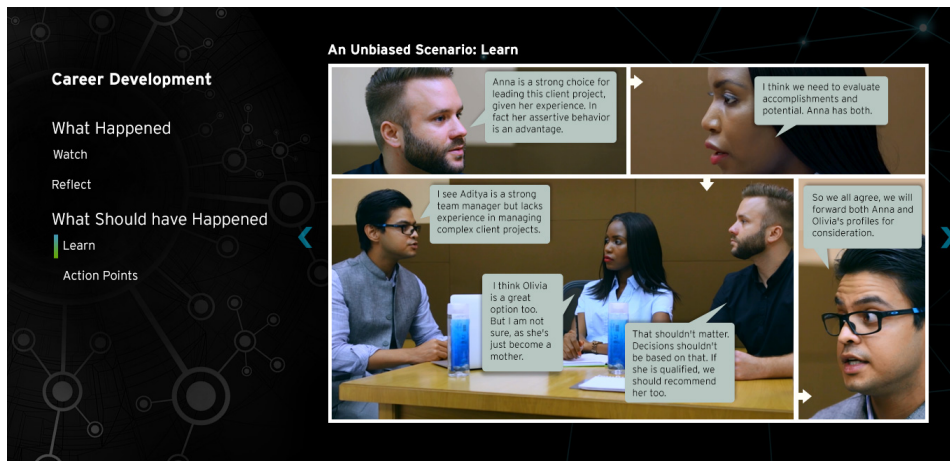
Figure 14: Video Cast Diversity



Source: Cognizant

- Graphic novel pages were used to depict the unbiased scenarios in a short, crisp format after the biased scenarios played out:

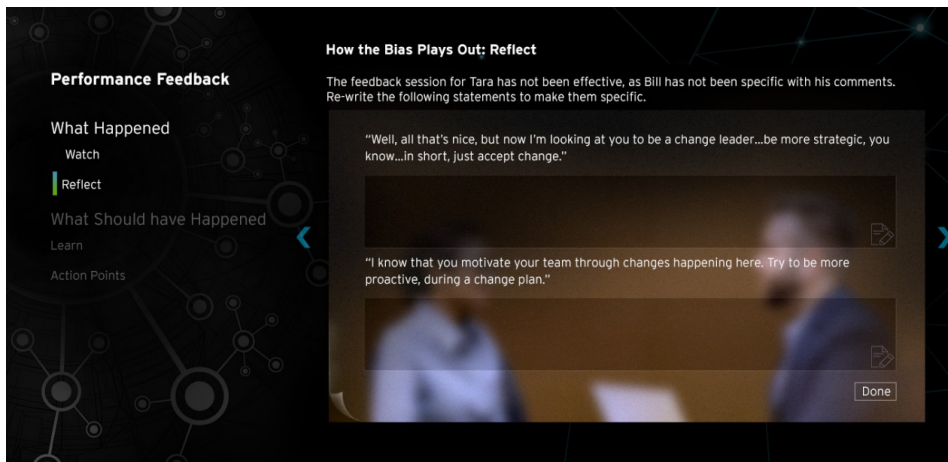
Figure 15: Graphic Novel Pages



Source: Cognizant

- Quick, contextual exercises allowed learners to interact with the content and record their observations:

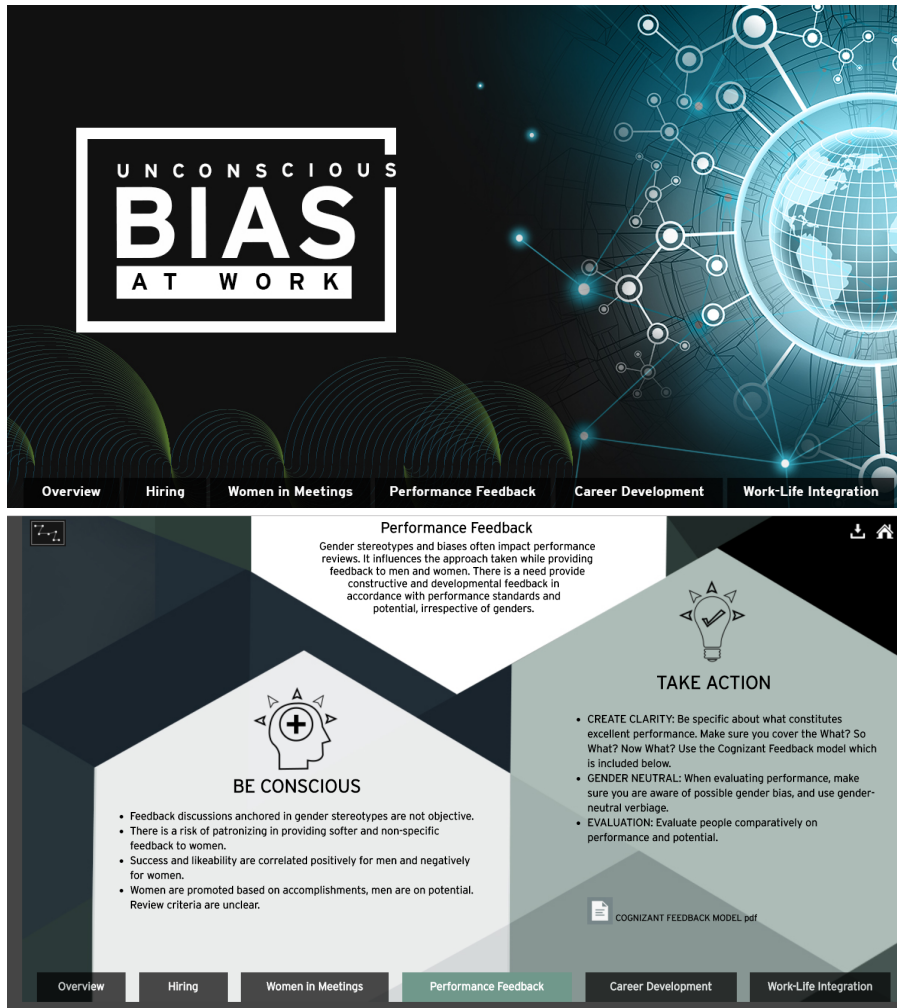
Figure 16: Contextual Exercises



Source: Cognizant

- A practical toolkit allowed the learners to download the do's and don'ts to apply to workplace decisions:

Figure 17: Practical Toolkit



Source: Cognizant

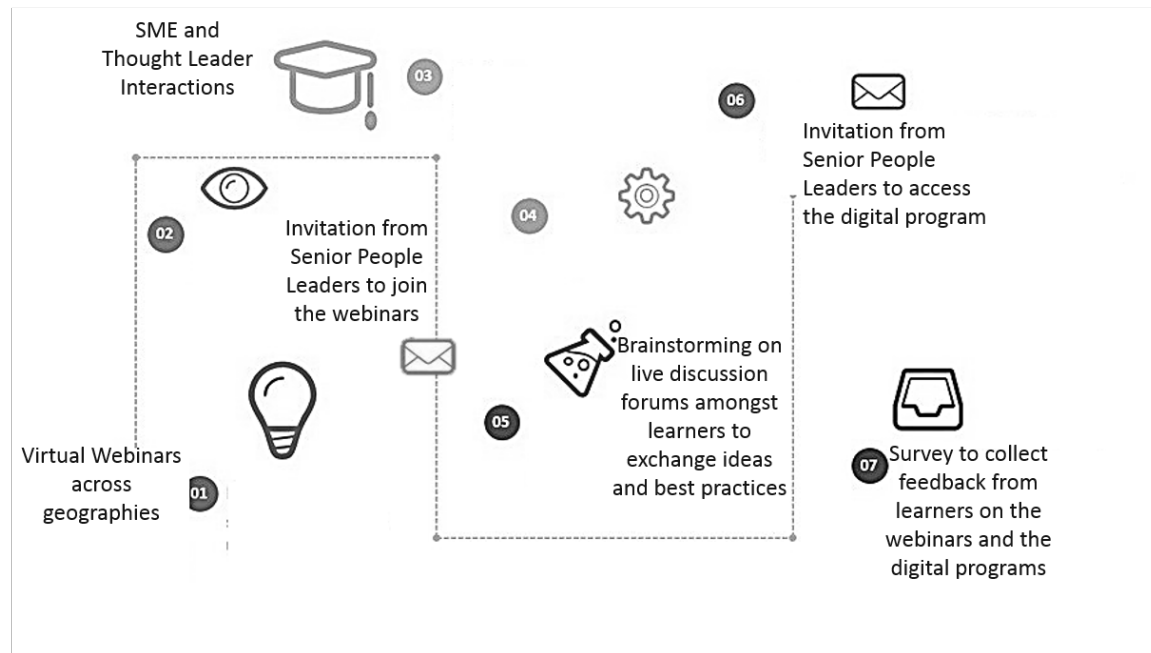
The program brought all the collateral together under one platform which seamlessly delivered the digital nuggets through all devices and in a single window.

Delivery of the Program

The target audiences for the program were senior managers and leaders in diverse geographies representing varied cultures, functions and business units. The aim was to reinforce the critical messaging through a mix of virtual webinars and complement these with the digital roadmap.

While virtual webinars and discussion forums allowed learners to engage with thought leaders and diversity experts in live sessions, a robust platform hosted the digital roadmap. A strong communication protocol was put in place to ensure reach and participation. The following is snapshot of the delivery strategy:

Figure 18: Platform Delivery Strategy



Source: Cognizant

The digital roadmap with its multiple video, audio and animation-driven collaterals was hosted from an internal platform. The program was delivered seamlessly through a single URL allowing learners to access the user interfaces intuitively and smoothly. With a robust back-end framework in place and the capability to host multi-media-rich, multi-device compatible formats, the platform delivered the learning in an Agile and scalable manner.

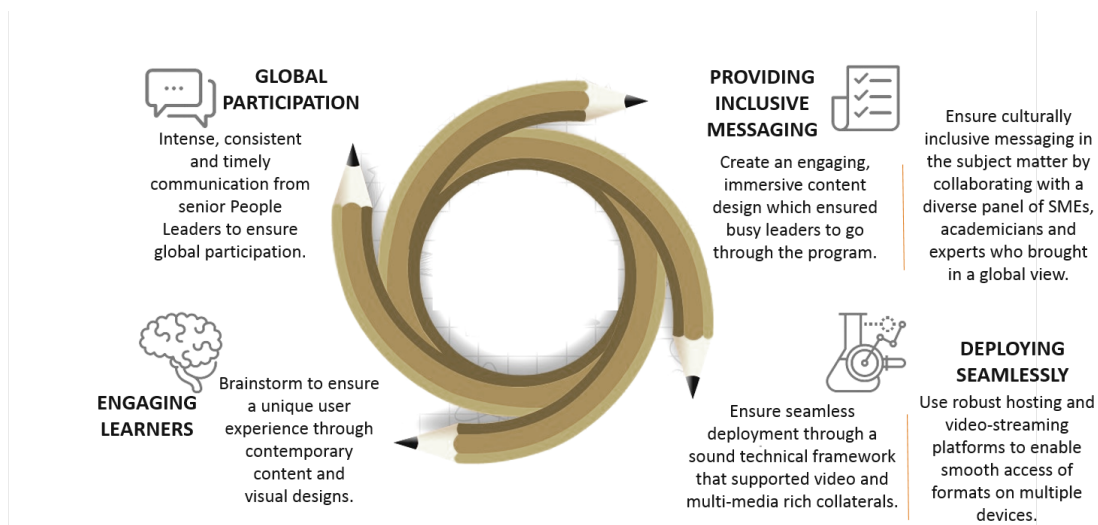
The challenges encountered during the design and development of the program were in the following areas:

- Disseminate culturally sensitive and globally inclusive content messaging and design.
- Ensure participation from a senior group who was hard-pressed for time.
- Enable the multi-media-rich collaterals to run seamlessly under one umbrella and through a single URL.



These were overcome by focused communication protocols, engaging instructional, content and visual designs, inclusive messaging and robust technical frameworks and platform support. The following snapshot provides further insight:

Figure 19: Overcoming Design and Development Challenges



Source: Cognizant

Change management was addressed through the three pillars of communication, training and post training support as displayed below:

Figure 20: Three Pillars of Communication, Training and Post-Training Support



Robust communication protocol through mailers and offline connects urged learners to attend webinars and go through the digital roadmap



Live webinars by industry experts and rich, immersive digital training program to ensure learning was deployed across geographies



Post training support was ensured through digital toolkits which could be used during the workplace scenarios to make effective decisions.

Source: Cognizant

Measurable Benefits

The success of a learning and development program can be truly validated when the learning outcomes and measurable benefits show tangible results. With the Unconscious Bias at Work program, a survey mechanism was built in to capture feedback at the beginning of the program through a detailed questionnaire.

Learners were also asked to add their thoughts about how they would make a difference to their workplace decisions in real life while facing the scenarios they had analyzed in the program. Three months later, they were requested to provide a real-life instance of how they had made a difference in their workplace interactions by making bias-free decisions. Supervisors were able to report a few changes such as the following:

Figure 21: Real-Life Learning Outcomes



Source: Cognizant

Overall

The program was received very well across the target audience group globally.

- 90% of the busy learners completed the program and mentioned they would like to go through it again.
- 80% found the content and design very engaging. They appreciated that the learning time for each collateral was not too time-consuming and contained practical check points.
- Content messaging was lent credibility by academicians, SMEs and thought leaders, which was noted by learners.
- The involvement of people and talent leaders in the webinars and business leaders in the overall program was seen as a positive boost for the program.
- The look-and-feel, video strategies and rich interfaces were appreciated.

The design and deployment of the program led to a few conclusions:

- A few respondents from the senior leader group felt that additional reference materials should be provided.
- Some respondents wished for the toolkit section to contain more of Cognizant-specific coaching frameworks in addition to the feedback framework which was included already.
- Experts who were brought in from outside and collaborated with diversity leaders within the organization felt that a social collaboration angle could be beneficial for the learners. The intensity of the discussions on the live chat indicated that learners would need the dialogues to continue.

Next/Future Outlook

- Phase Two of this program is being planned and content is targeted for larger groups and junior- and mid-level associates — in short, Cognizant's entire workforce.
- For this, certain scenarios will need to be tweaked and suited to be relevant to the target group.
- The digital learning team plans to analyze the user feedback and understand the learner perspective to see what other features can be added. As an example, the social media collaboration angle is being explored, as well as adding other parallel, dialogue-based symposiums and forums to the overall design to encourage women associates to engage.



About Brandon Hall Group

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