BIAS-BEATING TECHNOLOGY CASE STUDY: BENJAMIN OGHENE, DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL SOLUTIONS, VIALTO

When Ben Oghene started working for a big four accounting firm in central London, it was a significant achievement for him and his family. Ben grew up in Harlesden – a deprived area of west London where there were few professional role models.[66] One day he was on his lunch break when two police officers pulled him aside and told him that he fitted the description of a suspect wanted for armed robbery in the area. He was taken to the police station and kept for 23 hours before being released without charge.

The experience made Ben think about the types of biases we have as humans, and the lack of opportunity to address or prevent the negative impact of these biases towards under-represented or disadvantaged groups. So a couple of years ago, alongside greater public interest in inequality issues, Ben got involved in researching what technology might actually address these problems and deliver change. He discovered that a lot of people were talking about tackling bias, but we weren't seeing significant change.

Ben, who has a background in computer science, started working on solutions. One tool he helped to develop can mine the digital footprint of the user – emails and chat messages, for example – to identify whether individuals act differently towards different groups of people. This insight enables the employee to become aware of their inherent biases, how they might affect others, and steps they can take to address these, including training materials.

He's also involved with developing a VR experience that puts you in the shoes of a different demographic group, so that you can experience the world as others experience it, and witness how you're treated differently.