

6 Ways to Reduce Bias in Performance Reviews

Bias in performance reviews can hold back highly qualified employees from reaching their goals and prevent companies from fully utilizing their capabilities. Learn how to identify and minimize its impact on performance reviews.



Common Types of Bias in Performance Reviews

Experience Bias

Favor what seems most obvious to us, based on what we already know.

Example:

Missing information that could enhance your perception of an employee's work.

Distance Bias

Value what is closest to us, in terms of both space and time.

Example:

Placing more emphasis on an employee's most recent achievements and less emphasis on what they accomplish earlier in the review process.

Similarity Bias

Appreciate the contributions of those who are most like us.

Example:

Noticing the strengths of people who are similar to you more than people with whom you have less in common.

Confirmatory Bias

Focus on evidence that affirms existing beliefs¹ about an employee.

Example:

Assuming an employee excels in all aspects² of the job, after noticing them excelling in one component of their job.

How to Identify and Correct Bias

1 Develop a clear evaluation structure

- Avoid using open-ended questions only.
- Create a clear evaluation structure for all managers to follow and train them on how to use it.
- Include a list of clear, specific criteria for each evaluation.

Did you know?

Lack of structure in a performance review tends to advantage men, leading their managers to perceive them as possessing more leadership strengths than women.

2 Agree on specific goals

- Define goals³ with employees well before the performance review to track their progress over time.
- Review these goals before beginning an evaluation so that they're fresh in your mind.
- Keep a log of employee progress to not forget the value of what employees did throughout the year.

3 Find common ground

- Strive to find common ground with each employee. For example, discuss a work-related event that you both attended.
- Strive to find common ground all year round so that each employee becomes part of your "in-group".

4 Look at performance metrics

- Use analytics to track performance and evaluate employees more objectively.
- Ask HR to review this data, compare it against the results of the performance review, and discuss any discrepancies to determine whether the evaluation is accurate.

5 Gather feedback from multiple sources

- Seek input from different people who work with an employee, like direct reports, peers, and clients.
- Conduct a 360 review⁴ to get multiple perspectives and gain a clearer understanding of how the employee is performing.

6 Ask relevant questions

- Reevaluate your evaluation questions.
- Create questions that will challenge managers to dig deep for answers rather than allowing their preconceptions to guide them.

Tip

A strong question could ask managers to name three strengths of an employee in a specific area. That way, they won't write lengthy lists of goals for the employees they are biased toward while ignoring the strengths of others.