BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS
Tools for Performance Evaluations

THE CHALLENGE

A recent study of performance evaluations in tech found that 66% of women’s performance reviews contained negative personality criticism (“You come off as abrasive”) whereas only 1% of men’s reviews did.¹ We know now that workplaces that view themselves as being highly meritocratic often are, in fact, more biased than other organizations² and that the usual responses—one-shot diversity trainings, mentoring and networking programs—typically don’t work.³

THE SOLUTION

Bias interrupters are tweaks to basic business systems that can yield large gains: organizational interrupters change existing business systems; individual interrupters are steps individuals can take on their own.

Consider the Metrics

Here are some things to keep an eye out for:

- Do your performance evaluations show consistently higher ratings for majority men than for women, people of color, or other relevant groups?
- Do women’s ratings fall after they have children? Do employees’ ratings fall after they take parental leave or adopt flexible work arrangements?
- Do the same performance ratings result in different promotion or compensation rates for different groups?

Implement Bias Interrupters

1. **Start separating personality issues from skill sets for each candidate.** Remember the study that found 66% of women’s performance reviews contained negative personality criticism, but only 1% of men’s reviews did?⁴ Not acceptable. Personal style should be appraised separately from skills, because a narrower range of behavior often is accepted from women and people of color. For example, women may be labeled “difficult” for doing things that are accepted in majority men.⁵

2. **Level the playing field with respect to self-promotion by ensuring everyone knows they’re expected to do so and that they know how.** Distribute our Writing an Effective Self-Evaluation Guide to help. Some groups, notably women, people of Asian descent, and first-generation professionals may be reluctant to self-promote.⁶ By equipping all employees with this worksheet, modest and introverted people can benefit as well.
3. **Don’t accept global ratings without back-up.** Require evidence from the evaluation period that justifies the rating. Try: “In March, she gave X presentation in front of Y client on Z project, answered his questions effectively, and was successful in making the sale,” instead of: “She’s quick on her feet.”

4. **Consider performance and potential separately for each candidate.** Performance and potential should be appraised separately, given the tendency for majority men to be judged on potential; others on performance.⁷

5. **Equip yourself** and others involved in the evaluation process by keeping a copy of our Performance Evaluation Checklist nearby when writing and reviewing performance evaluations.

To better understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read and distribute our [Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Guide](#) which summarizes numerous studies.

---