

# Guidance for Mitigating Biases in Performance Management

Performance management processes are essential for supporting employee development and aligning individual contributions with organizational goals. However, they can unintentionally amplify biases, impacting fairness and equity. Biases—mental shortcuts that influence our perceptions and decisions—are present in all aspects of performance management, including goal setting, ongoing check-ins, and evaluations.

This appendix provides an overarching approach to mitigating biases in performance management, combining common overarching strategies with specific guidance tailored to each stage of the process.

## 1. Overarching Strategies to Mitigate Bias

These practices apply across all stages of performance management:

- **Self-Awareness:** Recognize and challenge your biases. Reflect on how stereotypes, personal preferences, or assumptions might influence your decision-making.
- **Consistency:** Use a standardized process for all employees to ensure fairness. Align behaviors with established best practices and apply criteria uniformly.
- **Transparency:** Clearly communicate expectations, processes, and decision-making criteria to employees.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Gather input from various sources to counteract individual biases and ensure well-rounded evaluations.

## 2. Mitigating Bias in Goal Setting

Goal setting is particularly susceptible to biases such as the affinity bias, in-group effect, personal bias/favoritism and consensus bias. Supervisors can mitigate these by:

- **Challenging Assumptions:** Avoid making assumptions about employees' abilities or desires for stretch opportunities. Offer all staff the ability to develop their skills.
- **Encouraging Employees:** Actively support employees who may underestimate their abilities.
- **Tailoring Goals:** Align goals with employees' unique developmental needs, career interests, and past performance.
- **Defining Success:** Communication expectations upfront about what meeting and exceeding expectations would look like in context of this goal.

### 3. Mitigating Bias in Ongoing Check-Ins

Ongoing check-ins, a critical element of performance management, are prone to biases like affinity bias, confirmation bias, fundamental attribution error, and recency bias. Supervisors can mitigate these by:

- **Process Consistency:** Allocate time for all employees and tailor check-ins (including cadence and duration) to their unique needs.
- **Quality Feedback:** Focus feedback on work-related observable behaviors and their impact. Use models like Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) for structured feedback.
- **Note-taking:** Take detailed notes during check-ins to ensure accurate recollection.
- **Connection to Goals:** Ground conversations in employees' goals and developmental progress.

### 4. Mitigating Bias in Evaluating Performance

The look-back aspects of performance evaluations often amplify biases similar to those found in ongoing check-ins, while the look-forward aspects reflect biases common to goal setting. To mitigate biases in performance evaluations, apply strategies outlined above along with the following:

- **Prepare Thoroughly:** Allow adequate time to review performance holistically, referencing notes from check-ins to reduce reliance on memory.
- **Focus on Results and Behaviors:** Center evaluations on measurable outcomes and specific behaviors rather than personal characteristics.
- **Seek Diverse Input:** Gather feedback from multiple sources to challenge assumptions and provide a balanced view.
- **Challenge Assumptions:** Look for evidence that contradicts your initial impressions to avoid confirmation bias.

### Biases defined in context of performance management

- **Affinity bias**—Giving preferential treatment to someone because they share similar experiences or remind you of someone you know and like.
- **Age, gender, race, and ability stereotypes**—Where similar performance and behaviors is viewed differently depending on identity.
- **Confirmation bias** -Tending to search for, interpret, focus on and remember information that aligns with our preconceived opinions.
- **Consensus bias**—Assuming your own thoughts, choices, and judgments are common and shared with others.
- **Fundamental Attribution error** – Attributing another's actions to their character or personality, discounting external situational factors outside of their control.
- **Halo/Horns effect** -Viewing someone positively/negatively because of competence or incompetence in one area.

- **In-group effect**—Favoring employees in one's in-group, often associated with cultural cohesion but also an issue with hybrid/flexible work settings.
- **Personal bias/favoritism**—Allowing your impressions of employees or your personal feelings about them to dominate the opportunities and evaluation provided.
- **Recency bias**—Giving recent situations, events, or information more weight and importance than older ones.