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## REDUCING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN PERFORMANCE REVIEW INSTRUMENTS

Use the following checklist to identify and reduce bias in performance review instruments. These items are based on the best evidence from research on patterns in performance evaluation.

- ☐ Are all of the performance criteria clearly defined? Are the standards for “what counts” as excellence in each criterion clearly defined (e.g. “excellence includes the following kinds of accomplishments”)?
- ☐ Do questions elicit descriptions of behaviors rather than inviting raters to list personal qualities or characteristics of employees? Do they focus on what the employee *does* rather than who (or what) the employee *is*?
- ☐ Are all of the performance criteria/standards important for doing the job well? Do the criteria or questions allow for a range of strengths and talents necessary for the job—rather than only highlighting one or two types of strengths/talents or communication or work styles traditionally associated with the job but not actually necessary for the job?
- ☐ Do any of the criteria or questions include assumptions that advantage or disadvantage certain employee groups (e.g., those who work flexible hours or from home, etc.)?
- ☐ Do any of the criteria or questions use ambiguous (and potentially biased) terms like “assertiveness,” “strong leadership,” “risk-taking”? If these are important to keep, does the instrument give specific examples of how these characteristics show up (e.g., strong leadership can include behaviors like “taking charge” but also can include bringing team members together, helping to solve or reduce misunderstandings, etc., so that “strong leadership” reflects a diverse range of effective leadership styles)?
- ☐ Is the evaluator encouraged to use a specific method to reduce reliance on overall impressions and vague judgements, such as the “free recall” method ([see the Talent Management Supervising Box for more info](#))? Prior to performing the evaluation, is the evaluator encouraged reflect on his or her own potential biases that may be in play with the employee being evaluated? (A section may be included in the evaluation tool for this purpose.)
- ☐ Do the criteria or questions allow recognition for involvement in mentoring other employees, in diversity efforts, or other similar kinds of activities? If mentoring programs or diversity efforts are to be more than lip service or token efforts, companies need to build participation in them into performance evaluations. Otherwise, employees, especially those from underrepresented groups who often are asked to take on these activities, run the risk of being penalized for this participation.