

Types of performance review biases & how to avoid them - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This article addresses bias in performance review processes, arguing that human cognitive biases significantly compromise the objectivity of employee evaluations. The author, a former Senior People Scientist at Culture Amp, presents ten specific types of bias that affect performance reviews, including recency bias, primacy bias, halo/horns effect, and gender bias. The article provides examples of each bias in workplace scenarios and offers practical prevention strategies such as collecting feedback at multiple time points, using structured rating scales, and implementing calibration processes. The piece emphasizes that biases can have serious consequences for promotion, compensation, and retention decisions, potentially undermining employee trust in the performance management process. The article concludes that recognizing these biases is the first step toward creating more fair and objective performance evaluation systems.

Key Insights

1. More than half of the variance in performance ratings relates to rater characteristics rather than actual employee performance
2. Gender bias manifests as men receiving feedback focused on behaviors/accomplishments while women receive personality-focused feedback
3. Small sample bias can make average teams appear poor when compared only internally rather than organization-wide

Practical Takeaways

- Collect performance feedback at multiple time points throughout the year to combat recency and primacy bias
- Use structured feedback formats with specific criteria rather than open-ended comments to reduce bias

Critical Analysis

Strengths include comprehensive coverage of bias types with concrete examples and actionable prevention strategies. The article draws on established psychological research principles. Limitations include lack of direct citations to original research studies, potential vendor bias toward Culture Amp's platform solutions, and incomplete coverage of intersectional biases beyond gender. The prevention

strategies, while practical, may require significant organizational resources to implement effectively.

Organizational Practice

Culture Amp analyzed 25,000 peer feedback statements across a performance cycle of nearly 1,500 employees to identify gender bias patterns in performance feedback

Strategic Implications

Organizations implementing bias reduction strategies in performance management may see improved employee trust, more accurate talent identification, and reduced gender-based disparities in career advancement and compensation decisions

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