Bias in the Evaluation Process

All humans are biased. Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist awarded the Nobel Prize for his groundbreaking work applying psychological insights to economics, demonstrated one simple truth: most human decisions are based on biases, beliefs, and intuition, *not* facts or logic.

This is part of why people tend to bring bias into the evaluation process, even when going into it with the best intentions.

What is bias?

Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another usually in a way that's considered to be unfair.

Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can have negative or positive consequences.

There are types of biases:

1. Conscious bias (also known as explicit bias)

2. Unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias)



UCSF https://diversity.ucsf.edu/programs-resources/training/unconscious-bias-training

What is unconscious bias?

An unconscious bias is any preference/belief that might lead an evaluator to rate differently - positively or negatively - than called for by the rating criteria, i.e., the rubric.

Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values. Biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure.



https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias
UCSF https://diversity.ucsf.edu/programs-resources/training/unconscious-bias-training

Awareness of Bias

Personal biases that may affect ratings can be about more than instructional methods. Just about anything an evaluator sees or hears in a classroom can trigger a favorable or unfavorable impression. That includes style of speech, dress, and the backgrounds of both educators and students.



Better Feedback for Better Teaching, 2016

What’s at Stake - Why Awareness of Bias Matters

Unconscious biases can lead to inconsistencies in the evaluation process and ratings, including deflated or inflated evaluation ratings.

It’s important to ensure that the evaluation process is as fair and objective as possible for all educators.



What’s at Stake - Why Awareness of Bias Matters

When evaluators are *unaware* of their biases in the evaluation process, educators can lose trust in their evaluator and in the overall process.

This can lead to disengagement and lack of motivation to view the evaluation process as an opportunity for growth and development. All of which can negatively impact the climate and culture of the school/district/BOCES.



Bias Awareness

It’s important to note: The potentially negative results of unconscious bias in the evaluation process are *not* a foregone conclusion.

As previously stated, it is important to remember that everyone has biases. They are the natural product of each individual’s unique set of experiences and are, therefore, a very normal thing.

An evaluator being aware of the potential biases that affect the evaluation process, and how to mitigate those biases, is the best way to minimize the impact of bias in your evaluations.

10 Biases That Affect Educator Evaluations

The following slides provide a description, example, and suggested prevention for 10 biases that affect educator evaluations. This information is also included in the handout referenced at the start of this module.

- Recency bias
- Primacy bias
- Halo/horns bias
- Centrality/Central Tendency bias
- Leniency bias
- Similar-to-me bias
- Idiosyncratic bias
- Confirmation bias
- Gender bias
- Familiarity bias

Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Recency Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Recency The tendency to focus on the most recent time period instead of the total time period. In part, it's easier to remember things that happened recently.	An educator starts the year strong and demonstrates leadership in their classroom and with their peers. However, by the time the mid-year connection comes around, they aren't as actively demonstrating this leadership. Their evaluator only focuses on the educator's lackluster performance and does not include their earlier contributions.	• Collect observation data at multiple times during the school year. • Invite additional observation and/or input from others, e.g., students and other educators, so the evaluator isn't the sole source.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Primacy Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Primacy The tendency to emphasize information learned early on over information gathered later. When the first impression influences the overall evaluation, positively or negatively.	If an educator has a rough start to a lesson, in terms of classroom management or gives students a wrong answer early in the lesson, the evaluator sees the rest of the lesson in a negative light.	• Similar to preventing recency bias, collect observation data from multiple points in the school year and when possible, from additional observers. • Check-in with yourself that your impressions at the start of the evaluation did not influence any final notes/takeaways..

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Halo/Horns Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Halo/Horns The tendency to allow one good or bad trait of the educator overshadow all others. While we all have traits we find more likeable or more irksome, this bias is when the evaluator's preferences overshadow the educator's performance.	An evaluator is so impressed with an educator's use of questioning in a lesson that evidence of ineffective checks for student understanding go unnoticed.	• Rely on the multiple aspects of professional practice included within the educator's rubric. While the evaluator may have areas of the rubric they are more drawn to, by ensuring all parts of the rubric are included can minimize this effect. • Check-in with yourself to honestly assess if you are including a "halo" or "horns" when evaluating an educator.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Centrality/Central Tendency Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Centrality/ Central Tendency The tendency to rate most aspects of an educator's evaluation in the middle of the rating scale, and avoid using the high or low ends of the scale. This is common when an evaluator likes to be viewed as moderate in their evaluations - not too tough, and not too lenient.	An evaluator bumps up low scores to "play it safe". This could be because they lack confidence in their accuracy or their ability to give helpful feedback. This can also occur when an evaluator is running short on time and simply needs to get the evaluations completed, so everyone gets a middle score.	• Ensure you are familiar with the rubric on which you are evaluating and that you have a clear understanding of what the practices mean at each Level. • Include time for completing evaluations - including time for observations and feedback - in your planning for the school year.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Leniency Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Leniency Occurs when the evaluator gives favorable ratings even though the educator has notable room for improvement. It can also occur when there is a perception of negative consequences if an accurate feedback/rating is given. This bias can weaken the overall evaluation process and dampen school/district/BOCES climate and culture.	Two educators who have the same evaluator, one educator consistently delivers adequately in their role and the other consistently goes above and beyond as a top performer. The evaluator rates both educators as above the standard to avoid hurting anyone's feelings and to maintain the appearance of high performance.	• Bolster familiarity with the rubric and your understanding of the professional practices at each Level. • Create opportunities for shared understanding of the expectations and what the professional practices look like at each Level with all educators you are evaluating. • Rely on gathering objective observation data to support scoring in the rubric.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Similar-to-me Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Similar-to-me The inclination to give a higher rating to educators with similar interests, skills, and backgrounds as the evaluator. Simply stated, we tend to like people that we believe are like us.	An evaluator who loves their alma mater may unintentionally inflate ratings for an educator who also graduated from that institution because of their high esteem for the school and what it represents to the evaluator. Additionally, similar-to-me bias can make your school/district/BOCES feel less inclusive for those who are not seen as similar to those in evaluation and leadership positions.	• Establish and affirm a shared understanding (among evaluators and educators) of the professional practices within the rubric(s) used by the evaluator. Evaluators who understand and agree on the criteria for evaluation are less likely to rely on stereotypes and assumptions, therefore, will minimize the tendency to this bias.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Idiosyncratic Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Idiosyncratic Occurs when an evaluator gives higher ratings for skills they are not good at or unfamiliar with, and conversely, gives lower ratings for skills they are good at, about which they bring a lot of existing knowledge. Ratings with this bias tell more about the evaluator than the educator.	An evaluator excels in one content area, with a significant amount of their career as an educator in that area, and now they are evaluating one educator in the same content area and one educator in a content area they know very little about. As a result, the evaluator unknowingly gives low ratings to the educator with the shared content area and high ratings to the educator in the less known content area. In the end, the ratings reflect more on the evaluator's content knowledge and confidence than the educators' practice.	• Discuss and affirm a shared understanding of the professional practices with the educator in advance of any observations. • Frame observations and feedback to align with the educator's goals. • Reflect and identify your own intentions prior to observing and evaluating educators for whom this bias may be a factor.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Confirmation Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Confirmation The tendency to search for or interpret new information in a way that confirms the evaluator's preexisting beliefs. This bias is similar to primacy bias yet tends to go much deeper. It makes it easier to believe people who align with our existing perceptions and beliefs, and why we are more skeptical of people who have differing points of view or beliefs.	Imagine an educator who is incredibly knowledgeable, fully engaged in their role and in their school setting, who is a pleasure to work with. When their evaluator receives feedback that supports this existing frame and belief about this educator, the evaluator is going to believe it. However, when that evaluator receives any feedback to the contrary, they may discount, dismiss, or ignore that valuable information.	• When collecting feedback from others, pay close attention to the feedback that goes against your beliefs/perceptions. • Whenever you have an impression of someone, seek evidence that may challenge or even disprove your initial perception/belief.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Gender Bias

Bias	Example	Prevention
Gender When giving feedback, this is the tendency to focus more on personality and attitudes of women and feminine-presenting educators. While contrarily, focusing more on the behaviors and accomplishments of men and masculine-presenting educators. *NOTE:* Gender biases can have a huge impact on the experiences and evaluations of nonbinary and/or transgender educators. The biases may manifest slightly differently, and it's important to stay alert and aware.	Imagine two educators, one a woman and one a man. Both are highly qualified, have similar years of experience, and received positive accolades. Past feedback from their respective evaluators include: • "He could work on his content expertise." • "She is challenging to work with in small group projects." His feedback is focused on skill set, and viewed as fixable with PD. While hers is based on work style/personality, and viewed as static and non-changing.	• Maintain focus on the professional practices within the educator's rubric, and ensure a shared understanding of how the practices are applicable to the educator's classroom or learning environment. • Structure feedback around the professional practices and opportunities for the educator to continue to grow/deepen their skills and practice.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023

Biases in Evaluations: Familiarity

Bias	Example	Prevention
Familiarity Occurs when prior knowledge of the educator or students contributes to the evaluator being either overly lenient or overly strict in their feedback/rating.	The evaluator "knows", from previous visits to an educator's classroom, that a rating should be higher than the lesson observed warrants, resulting in an inflated rating. The evaluator feels the students are "capable of more" based on prior observations and experiences working with them, resulting in a lower rating for the educator.	• Similar to other biases, collect observation data from multiple points in the school year and when possible, include additional observers. • Check-in with yourself to honestly assess if/how your familiarity with an educator and/or their students may be creating a bias in their evaluation.

Adapted from Culture Amp, https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/performance-review-bias, 2023
and, *Better Feedback for Better Teaching*, 2016

Awareness of Bias

Remember, biases often occur without the evaluator’s knowledge and are less likely to occur when the evaluator makes a conscious effort to counteract them.

When armed with awareness of these common biases, evaluators are more likely to recognize these tendencies during the evaluation process and make meaningful adjustments.

