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## What is Gender Bias?

Gender bias is where we unfairly judge someone because of their gender and is often influenced by stereotypes. We often assume that men hold 'agentic' traits, like being decisive, and women hold 'communal' traits, like being kind [1]. This can cause an imbalance of how men and women are perceived and treated in the workplace.

## How does this relate to annual reviews?

In annual reviews, this can lead to women being perceived as less competent and that they don't meet professional expectations in the corporate world, despite being equally qualified [1]. As a result, women may face harsher evaluations [2], fewer promotions, and slower career progression, requiring them to work harder than men to reach the same level [3].



## Evidence of Gender Bias in Annual Reviews

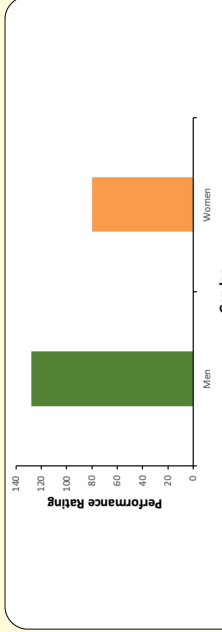


Figure 1. Gender Differences in Annual Employee Review. [4]  
This chart shows how performance ratings differ between men and women, even when roles and qualifications are similar.

## Intersectionality

As an employer, it's important to understand **intersectionality**, the concept that some individuals face an overlap of bias [11]. For example, a woman might face bias not just because of her gender but also because of her race, leading to extra barriers and unfair treatment in the workplace.

These stereotypes can impact performance assessments, making career advancement particularly difficult. Recognising and addressing these biases in annual reviews is essential to ensure evaluations are fair and free from prejudice, helping all employees thrive in corporate environments.

## A Guide for Corporate Employers

### What does this bias actually look like?

If you hold gender stereotypes, such as assuming women are more emotional and less logical, you may unfairly rate a male employee's performance more positively, assuming logical skills apply to all aspects of their work, even when this is not accurate or relevant.

For example, you might unintentionally see a female employee as less suited for a leadership role, even if she has the skills and qualifications. This can cause you to overlook her contributions and undervalue her role, leading to lower evaluation scores in her annual review compared to her male colleagues.

When employees don't conform to traditional gender stereotypes, women may face criticism for being "too assertive" or "dominant," while men are often praised for displaying the same traits. These biases can unfairly influence the annual reviews you conduct, impacting your assessment of their overall performance.

### Why does this happen in evaluations?

As employers, we sometimes hold a bias where our overall judgment of someone is shaped by a single trait they hold, like likability, leading us to assume they possess other positive qualities as well. This is called the **Halo Effect** [5].

Bias can happen in corporate evaluations when women are seen as not matching the qualities expected for certain roles, like leadership positions, because of stereotypes about gender. This is suggested by the **Lack of Fit Model** [7].

**Role Congruity Theory** says that we are more likely to view someone who aligns with traditional gender stereotypes more positively than someone who does not [10].



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### What can you do?

**Gender-Blind Evaluations:** This is where you assess an employee performance based on data gathered throughout the year, without knowing which employee the data comes from and therefore without knowing their gender [6].

This helps to prevent gender bias from affecting your decisions when conducting an annual review.

**Eliminating Ambiguity:** Gender bias tendencies are heightened when performance criteria is unclear. Therefore, setting clear and objective standards of performance expectations can ensure that your decisions are based on performance, not gender stereotypes [8].

This can be done by using a **standardised rating scale** [9], evaluating your employees performance using a 1-5 scale of how well an employee performs in key aspects of a job role.

**Inclusive Leadership Training:** This is a training program aimed at managers and performance reviewers that aims to redefine what "good leadership" looks like through interactive discussion meetings, role-play, and outlining a clear and objective criteria for assessing performance in your workplace [10].

These programs promote diverse leadership styles and actively address gender bias, moving towards a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

### Your next steps...

As an employer, addressing these biases is crucial to ensuring fair evaluations, recognising talent, and creating a more productive and inclusive workplace. By creating an environment where all employees feel valued and supported, your company can strive for both equity and success [6, 8, 10].



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