

Bureau of Human Resources

Bias Awareness for Interview Panel Members



City of Portland
Bureau of
Human Resources
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BIAS AWARENESS TRAINING

for City Interview Panel Members

This training is provided to assist interview panel members who are participating in a selection process for a City of Portland position.

Introduction

In April 2012, the Portland City Council adopted the Portland Plan, a strategic plan to guide future City decisions. A core tenet of the Portland Plan is that “advancing equity must be at the core of our plans for the future.”

The Portland Plan defines equity as “when everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential.” Further, it is City Council's intention to achieve equity in City government policies, procedures, and practices. Equity in hiring, workforce, contracting, and employment opportunities in the City are essential to achieving the vision of the Portland Plan.



Equity in the City's Hiring Practices

In order to ensure equitable hiring practices, it is essential to address the issue of bias in employment candidate selection. Interviewing is one of the most important processes in hiring. In addition to conducting interviews by a panel of diverse participants, the City is providing bias awareness training to interview panel members.

We know that interviewing is not scientific. We make subjective observations in even the most structured interview processes. In order to make the best decisions about candidates and ensure an equitable process, we must be aware of how our biases can impact the selection process.

What is Bias?

First, it's important to understand what bias is, and why we all have bias.

Bias is often regarded negatively. For the purpose of this discussion, we speak of *bias* in the context of partiality, preconceived notion, and predisposition. The reality is that biases naturally come from our brains' use of *schemas*. A schema can be described as a template of knowledge. We use schemas to process the information that bombards our senses every moment of every day. This is simply a way for us to sort information into categories that make sense to us. We have schemas about objects, processes, and other human beings.

For example, our brain uses a schema to assign the category of "chair" to an object based on its flat seat, back, and legs, even though the chair might be plain wood or lavishly upholstered. We may have a negative bias about plain wood chairs because we have had the uncomfortable experience of sitting in one for an extended period of time. We have a schema for the process of ordering food at a restaurant: we know what it means when a smiling person hands us a laminated document with descriptions of various dishes and prices. And, by observing assorted traits, we use schemas to naturally assign people into categories such as age, gender, race, and role.

There are two types of bias, explicit and implicit. Both types of bias include *stereotypes* and *attitudes*.

Stereotypes are traits that we associate with a category. These associations may arise from direct personal experience or they might be relayed to us through stories, media, and culture. "Elderly people are frail" is an example of a stereotype.

Attitudes are overall evaluative feelings that are positive or negative. If we meet someone who graduated from the same university, we will tend to feel more at ease with that person.



What is implicit bias?

By definition, *implicit biases* are those we carry without awareness or conscious direction. It is the result of our human brains using schemas to organize information into categories. Most of the work our brains do occurs on the unconscious level. Implicit bias does not mean that we hide our prejudices. *We literally do not know we have them.* This is important for interviewers to understand because without awareness we cannot know if we are acting on hidden bias.

Implicit bias is also referred to as hidden or unconscious bias.

What is explicit bias?

In contrast, *explicit bias* means that we are aware that we have a particular thought or feeling. It sometimes also means we understand the source of that thought or feeling. If you have an explicitly positive attitude toward chocolate, you consciously endorse and celebrate that preference.

Why do both types of bias matter in the interview process?

Implicit Bias in the Interview Process

Implicit bias is problematic in the interview process because we are unaware of certain preferences or attitudes. Use every opportunity to consider your reasons for a particular rating and challenge your thinking. Talk over your reasons with other interviewers. Try to avoid using the terminology of a candidate being a “better fit” over another candidate(s). Without this reflection and questioning, we cannot identify hidden bias and eliminate it.

Explicit Bias in the Interview Process

How many times have you heard this before? “I always look for a candidate who makes direct eye contact. People who don’t look straight at you don’t make good employees in the long run.” This is an example of explicit bias. The speaker is stating a known preference. In the context of candidate evaluation, the reason this particular bias is problematic is because in many cultures, direct eye contact is considered to be very rude and to be avoided whenever possible.



Examples of Bias

In order to reduce the chance of making a poor decision in the interview process, raters must make a conscious effort to recognize biases, both implicit and explicit, and eliminate them. Following are examples of bias which may be explicit, implicit, or both.

Average/Central Bias

Rating all candidates the same, or tending to give all candidates the middle rating (e.g., a 3 on a 5 point scale).

Contrast

When you compare/contrast one candidate against another rather than comparing candidates against an ideal, you may get skewed results. Example: a candidate appears stronger than she should because she followed two weak candidates. Evaluating the candidate against the qualifications and competencies will help mitigate this bias.

Cultural Noise

Cultural noise occurs when the candidate provides socially acceptable responses – telling the interviewer what he/she believes the interviewer wants to hear – rather than factually-based responses.

First Impression

Many people think they can accurately assess someone within the first few minutes of meeting them. Making up your mind so soon is a bias that corrupts overall judgment.

Halo Effect / Devil Effect

The interviewer favors the candidate due to one good or positive trait or characteristic, sometimes despite several negatives (halo effect). Alternatively, the interviewer allows one negative trait or characteristic to be a disqualifier (devil effect).



More Examples of Bias

Knowledge-of-Predictor

When an evaluator has foreknowledge of how the candidate has performed on another test or interview and allows knowledge of previous performance (good or bad) to influence rating.

Leniency

A rater who tends to give inflated ratings and who is not critical enough.

Nonverbal Bias

Body language, eye contact or lack thereof, etc. Consider cultural differences and avoid overemphasizing nonverbal behavior in responses. See also “Business Etiquette” in the next section.

Recency

A bias toward the candidate seen most recently because he/she is the freshest in memory. This is why you should always write down notes or scores immediately and score all candidates against the “ideal candidate” qualifications and competencies.

Similar-to-Me

This occurs when an interviewer identifies with the candidate on a personal level instead of evaluating based on job-related criteria. For example, many people will subconsciously favor a candidate with whom they share a characteristic, hobby, alma mater, opinion, etc.

Stereotyping

As previously described, this bias happens when the rater makes an assumption about a candidate based on gender, ethnicity, religion, age, familial status, etc. Stereotyping is influenced by both implicit and explicit bias.



Other Considerations

What other candidate characteristics must we be aware of?

Extrovert vs. Introvert: 50% of all humans are introverts. Extroverts may tend to perform and relate better to interviewers even if they are not as qualified as other, more introverted candidates.

Communication Styles: circular vs. linear; direct vs. indirect; emotionally expressive vs. restrained, etc.

Business Etiquette: nonverbal behavior: handshakes, distance, gestures, eye contact: attire which may be regarded as “ethnic;” or women wearing pants vs. a dress or skirt.

Social Values or Norms: individualistic vs. collectivistic; competitive vs. cooperative; authority-oriented vs. egalitarian.

REMINDERS

- Bias may occur intentionally or unintentionally. Be aware of how bias may affect your decision-making during the interview process.
- Recognize your biases, then eliminate them.
- Be as objective as possible.
- Focus on content.
- Dispel first impressions.
- Rate candidates against job competencies or an ideal candidate profile – not against one another.
- Justify your decisions and be able to articulate your reasons.



Additional Information about implicit (hidden) bias:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo>



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