

# Is Bias Training “Effective”?

Shelley J. Correll

Professor of Sociology and Organizational Behavior

**Stanford** | VMware Women’s Leadership  
Innovation Lab

# A better answer than “no” or “yes”



Bias training is **necessary**, but **NOT sufficient** to create sustainable progress on DEI outcomes

# Why is bias training ALONE not sufficient?



It assumes a naive theory of change.

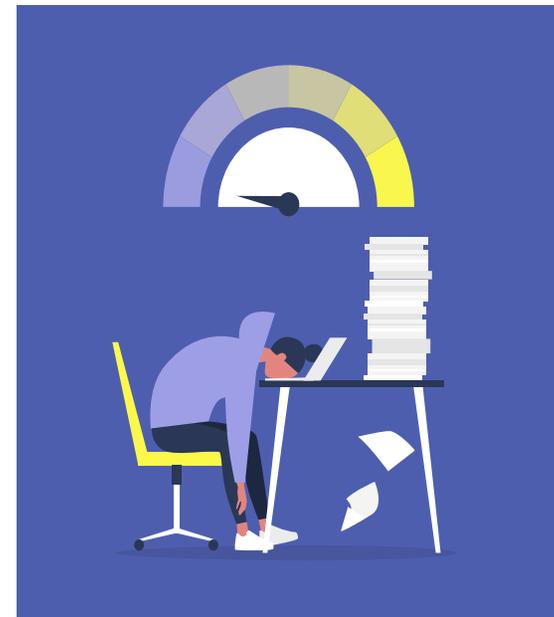
It neglects the contextual nature of bias.

# Some conditions that amplify bias

Operating in **crisis** mode.

**Criteria** for making evaluations are unclear.

Evaluation **process** is unstructured.



# An alternative model for reducing bias:

Ask managers/evaluators to create tools that minimize the conditions that amplify bias



[“A Small Wins Model of Change,” Correll 2017](#)

## *If GoDaddy Can Turn the Corner on Sexism, Who Can't?*



Charles Duhigg

ADVENTURES IN CAPITALISM JULY 23, 2017



GoDaddy overhauled its employee evaluation forms, replacing open-ended questions with specific criteria that evaluated employees' impact, rather than their character. Instead of asking if someone is good at communicating, the new evaluation form asked managers to document instances when an employee shared knowledge with a colleague, or collaborated with a team.

By then, GoDaddy had been recognized as being among the nation's top workplaces for women in tech. The company's policies on equal pay, its ~~methods for recruiting a diverse work force and its approach to~~ promoting women and minorities had been lauded inside business schools and imitated at other firms.

## So, why is bias training necessary?



People who think bias is not a problem are most likely to be biased.

Without an awareness of bias, well intentioned people build biases into new systems.



Bias education gives well-intentioned people a framework to **effectively** change **the conditions** that lead to bias in their organizations.

# To learn more...

[womensleadership.stanford.edu](https://womensleadership.stanford.edu)

[Correll 2017, MacKenzie et al. 2020](#)

## Criteria Monitoring

A methodology to block bias in the evaluation of talent.

Evaluating and rewarding employees fairly is a critical competency that has to be learned. Unconscious bias and hidden preferences for certain employee traits or behaviors can lead to unfair assessments that are inconsistent across a team. Criteria monitoring is a three-step tool you and your team can quickly learn and practice to weed out bias in your talent decision-making process. Try it during critical career-advancing situations such as hiring, performance management and promotion conversations.

### 1 Define effective criteria *before* making critical decisions about employees.

- Consider what's important for the role – make criteria measurable and specific.
- Be sure to take into account any changes to the roles and responsibilities that have occurred in the past year and to discuss consistent ways to measure and assess these changes to their work.

1



2

### 2 Align all decision makers.

- Ensure everyone doing assessments is not only using the same criteria, but that they also share the same concrete definitions of them.
- Elevate skills and behaviors that are often overlooked or undervalued yet are critical for team success.
- Discuss whether you as a team are valuing the right things. Question whether following “how things have always been” (status quo) still works in today's context.



3

### 3 Engage others in being consistent and equitable.

- Encourage managers to monitor one another when discussing performance to catch shifts in the use of agreed criteria.
- Have the team check itself at the end of each discussion by asking “Did we veer off our agreed upon criteria for this employee?”.



#

This infographic is designed to support you in creating inclusive workplaces. The full article, “How Do You Evaluate Performance During a Pandemic?” authored by Lori Nishiura Mackenzie, JoAnne Wehner and Sofia Kennedy is available at *Harvard Business Review*. This is part of a series created by the VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab at Stanford University, which generates research to advance women's leadership by diagnosing barriers, develops interventions to get beyond barriers, and disseminates research-based solutions.

**Stanford** | VMware Women's Leadership  
Innovation Lab

© Stanford University 2021. All rights reserved.

Continue the conversation  
Twitter: @SVLeadershipLab  
Web: [womensleadership.stanford.edu](https://womensleadership.stanford.edu)