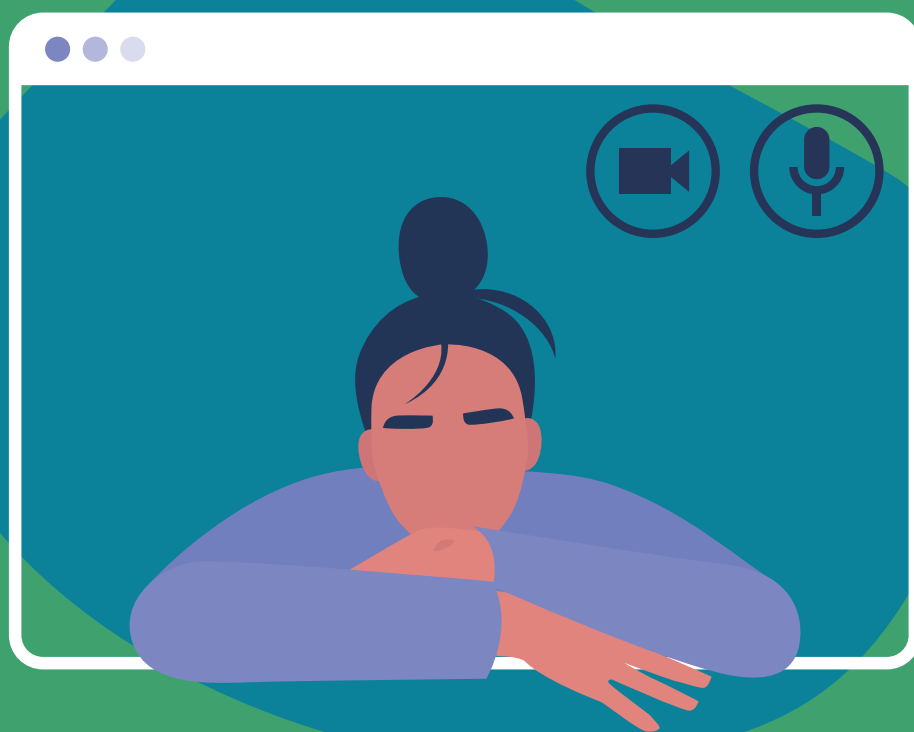


BIAS INTERRUPTERS TOOLS FOR TECH

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Tech workplaces can improve diversity and make progress toward eliminating bias by using the same tools that businesses use to solve any major problem: evidence, goals, and metrics. Research shows that diverse workgroups perform better and are more committed, innovative, and loyal.¹ Gender-diverse workgroups have higher collective intelligence, which improves the performance of both the group and the individuals in the group, in addition to improving the company's financial performance.² Racially diverse workgroups consider a broader range of alternatives, make better decisions, and are better at solving problems.³ Bias, if unchecked, affects many different groups: women, people of color, modest or introverted men, LGBTQIA+ people, individuals with disabilities, and professionals from non-professional backgrounds ("class migrants"). We've distilled the huge literature on bias into simple steps that help you and your organization perform better.

We know now that workplaces that view themselves as being highly meritocratic often are *more* biased than other organizations.⁴ Research also shows that the usual responses to workplace bias—one-shot diversity trainings, mentoring and networking programs—typically don't work.⁵

What holds more promise is a paradigm-changing approach to diversity: bias interrupters are tweaks to basic business systems that are evidence-based and can produce measurable change. Bias interrupters change systems, not people.

Printed here are 6 toolkits for computing workplaces, with information for how to interrupt bias in the following business systems:

1. Bias in Hiring
2. Access to Opportunities
3. Performance Evaluations
4. Bias in Meetings
5. Family Leave
6. Workplace Flexibility

[For additional worksheets and information visit BiasInterrupters.org](https://BiasInterrupters.org)

Our toolkits take a 3-step approach:

1. **Use Metrics:** Businesses use metrics to assess whether they have progressed towards any strategic goal. Metrics can help you pinpoint where bias exists, and assess the effectiveness of the measures you've taken to prevent or combat bias. (Whether metrics are made public will vary from organization to organization, and from metric to metric.)

2. **Implement Bias Interrupters:** Bias interrupters are small adjustments to your existing business systems. They should not require you to entirely abandon your current systems.
3. **Repeat As Needed.** After implementing bias interrupters, return to your metrics. If they have not improved, you will need to ratchet up to stronger bias interrupters.

Interrupting Bias in Hiring

THE CHALLENGE

From 2001-2009, 20% of Black computer science graduates attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Despite that number, Silicon Valley did not look at HBCUs to recruit new talent.⁶ If tech companies really want to hire more diverse teams, they need to reconsider where they focus their recruiting efforts.

When comparing identical resumes, “Jamal” needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as “Greg,” mothers were 79% less likely to be hired than an otherwise-identical candidate without children, and “Jennifer” was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than “John.”⁷ An audit study found that queer women, were 30 percent less likely to get a call back than straight women,⁸ and gay men had to apply to 5 more jobs in order to receive a positive response than straight men.⁹ Unstructured job interviews do not predict job success,¹⁰ and judging candidates on “culture fit” can screen out qualified candidates who don’t look the same as the majority of your existing employees.¹¹

THE SOLUTION: A 3-STEP APPROACH

1. Use Metrics

Businesses use metrics to assess whether they have progressed towards any strategic goal. Clear metrics can help you pinpoint where bias exists, and assess the effectiveness of the measures you’ve taken. (Whether metrics are made public will vary from organization to organization, and from metric to metric.)

For each metric, examine:

- Do patterned differences exist among majority men, majority women, men of color, and women of color? (Include any other historically excluded group that your organization tracks, such as military veterans, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.)

Important Metrics to Analyze:

- Track the demography of the candidate pool through the entire hiring process: from the initial pool of candidates considered, to who survives resume review, who gets invited to interview, who survives the interview process, who gets job offers, who accepts those offers, and who doesn’t. Analyze where historically excluded groups are falling out of the hiring process.
- Track whether hiring qualifications are waived more often for some groups.

- Track interviewers' reviews and/or recommendations to ensure they are not consistently rating majority candidates higher than others.

Keep metrics by: 1) individual supervisor; 2) department; 3) location if relevant; and 4) the organization as a whole.

2. Implement Bias Interrupters

All bias interrupters should apply both to written materials and in meetings, where relevant. Because every organization is different, not all interrupters will be relevant. Consider this a menu.

To understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read the [Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet](#), which summarizes hundreds of studies.

Empower and Appoint

Empower people involved in the hiring process to spot and interrupt bias by using the [Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet](#). Read and distribute to anyone involved in hiring.

Appoint Bias Interrupters. Provide HR professionals or team members with special training to spot bias, and involve them at every step of the hiring process. Training is available at BiasInterrupters.org.

Assemble a Diverse Pool

- **Limit referral hiring (“friends of friends”).** If your existing organization is not diverse, hiring from your current employees' social networks will replicate the lack of diversity. If you use referrals, keep track of the flow of candidates from referrals. If referrals consistently provide majority candidates, consider limiting referrals or balance out referral hiring with more targeted outreach to ensure a diverse candidate pool.
- **Tap diverse networks.** Reach out to candidates from historically excluded groups where they are. Identify job fairs, affinity networks, conferences and training programs that are aimed at women and people of color in computing and send recruiters.
- **Consider candidates from multi-tier schools.** Don't limit your search to candidates from Ivy League and top-tier schools. This favors majority candidates from elite backgrounds and hurts people of color and professionals from non-professional backgrounds (class migrants).¹² Studies show that top students from lower ranked schools are often similarly successful.¹³
- **Get the word out.** If candidates from historically excluded groups are not applying to your jobs, get the word out that your organization is a great

place to work for women and people of color. One company offers public talks by women at their company and writes blog posts, white papers, and social media articles highlighting the women who work there.

- **Change the wording of your job postings.** Using masculine-coded words like “leader” and “competitive” will tend to reduce the number of women who apply.¹⁴ Tech alternatives (see: Textio¹⁵) can help you craft job postings that ensure you attract top talent without discouraging women.
- **Insist on a diverse pool.** If you use a search firm, tell them you expect a diverse pool, not just one or two candidates from historically excluded groups. One study found the odds of hiring a woman were 79 times greater if there were at least two women in the finalist pool; the odds of hiring a person of color were 194 times greater if there were at least two people of color.¹⁶

Resume Review

- **Distribute the [Identifying Bias in Hiring Worksheet](#).** Before resumes are reviewed, have reviewers read the worksheet so that they are aware of the common forms of bias that can affect the hiring process.
- **Pre-commit to what’s important—and require accountability.** Pre-commit in writing to what qualifications are important, both in entry-level and in lateral hiring. When qualifications are waived for a specific candidate, require an explanation of why they are no longer important—and keep track to see for whom requirements are waived.¹⁷
- **Ensure resumes are graded on the same scale.** Establish clear grading rubrics and ensure that everyone grades on the same scale. Consider having each resume reviewed by two different people and averaging the score.
- **Remove extra-curricular activities from resumes.** Including extra-curricular activities on resumes can artificially disadvantage class migrants. A recent study showed that law firms were less likely to hire a candidate whose interests included “country music” and “pick-up soccer” rather than “classical music” and “sailing”—even though their work and educational experience was exactly the same.¹⁸ Because most people aren’t as aware of class-based bias, communicate why you are removing extracurricular activities from resumes.
- **Avoid inferring family obligations.** In one study, mothers were 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.¹⁹ Train people not to make inferences about whether someone is committed to their job due to parental status and to not count “gaps in a resume” as an automatic negative.
- **Try using “blind auditions” where the evaluators don’t know who they are reviewing.** If women and candidates of color are dropping out of the pool at the resume review stage, consider removing demographic info from resumes before review. This way, candidates can be evaluated based solely on their qualifications.

Interviews

- **Use structured interviews.** Ask the same list of questions to every person who is interviewed. Ask questions that are directly relevant to the job the candidate is applying for.²⁰
- **Ask performance-based questions.** Performance-based questions, or behavioral interview questions, (“Tell me about a time you had too many things to do and had to prioritize”) are a strong predictor of how successful a candidate will be at the job.²¹
- **Try behavioral interviewing²²** Ask questions that reveal how candidates have dealt with prior work experiences, as research shows that structured behavioral interviews can more accurately predict the future performance of a candidate than unstructured interviews.²³ Instead of asking, “How do you deal with problems with your manager?” ask, “Describe for me a conflict you had at work with your manager.” When evaluating answers, a good model to follow is the STAR²⁴ model: the candidate should describe the Situation they faced, the Task that they had to handle, the Action they took to deal with the situation, and the Result.
- **Do work-sample screening.** If applicable, ask candidates to provide a sample of the type of work they will be doing in the job they will be filling.
- **Develop a consistent rating scale and discount outliers.** Candidates’ answers (or work samples) should be rated on a consistent scale, with ratings for each factor backed up by evidence. Average the scores granted on each relevant criterion and discount any scores that are much higher or lower than the average.²⁵
- **If “culture fit” is a criterion for hiring, provide a specific work-relevant definition.** Culture fit can be important, but when it’s misused it can disadvantage people of color, class migrants, and women.²⁶ Heuristics like the “airport test” (who would I like to get stuck in an airport with?) can be highly exclusionary and not work-relevant. Questions about sports and hobbies may feel exclusionary to women and to class migrants who did not grow up, for example, playing golf or listening to classical music. Google’s work-relevant definition of “culture fit” is a helpful starting point.²⁷
- **“Gaps in a resume” should not mean automatic disqualification.** Give candidates an opportunity to explain gaps by asking about them directly during the interview stage. Women fare better in interviews if they are able to provide information upfront, rather than having to avoid the issue.²⁸
- **Provide candidates and interviewers with a handout detailing expectations.** Develop an [Interview Protocol Sheet](#) that explains to everyone what’s expected from candidates in an interview.
- **When hiring, don’t ask candidates about prior salary.** Asking about prior salary when setting compensation for a new hire can perpetuate the gender

pay gap.²⁹ (A growing legislative movement prohibits employers from asking prospective employees about their prior salaries.³⁰)

3. Repeat As Needed

- Return to your key metrics. Did the bias interrupters produce change?
- If you don't see change, you may need to implement stronger bias interrupters, or you may be targeting the wrong place in the hiring process.
- Use an iterative process until your metrics improve.

Interrupting Bias in Access to Opportunities

THE CHALLENGE

Every workplace has high-profile assignments that are career-enhancing (“glamour work”) and low-profile assignments that are beneficial to the organization but not the individual’s career. Research shows that women do more “office housework”³¹ than men.³² This includes literal housework (ordering lunch), administrative work (scheduling meetings), emotion work (“she’s upset, comfort her”), and non-promotable work (preparing the PowerPoint for a presentation). When women of color don’t have access to the high-profile work, organizations miss out on tapping all of their top talent.

When employees become “overburdened” with office housework, it reduces the amount of time that they can spend on more important, career-enhancing work, which can hurt their compensation and chances for promotion.

In some organizations, women of color in technical roles are forced to do all of the HR, DEI, or office management work — in addition to their regular job duties. This is unacceptable, hurts the careers of women of color, and can cause organizations to lose these employees quickly. Companies can choose to distribute the tasks equally among the team, or to hire someone else whose job it is to do HR, DEI, or office management, but expecting women of color to take on this extra burden is not an option.

Diversity at the top can only occur when a diverse pool of employees at all levels of the organization have access to opportunities that let them take risks and develop new skills. If the glamour work and the office housework aren’t distributed evenly, you won’t be tapping into the full potential of your workforce. Most organizations that use an informal “hey, you!” assignment system end up distributing opportunities based on factors other than experience and talent.

If women and people of color keep getting stuck with the same low-profile assignments, they will be more likely to be dissatisfied and to search for opportunities elsewhere.³³

THE SOLUTION

Fair allocation of the glamour work and the office housework are two separate problems. Some organizations will want to solve the office housework problem

before tackling the glamour work; others will want to address both problems simultaneously. We have created [a Road-Map for Implementation](#).

1. Use Metrics

A. Identify and Track

The first step is to find out if, and where, you have a problem. Find out:

- What is the office housework and glamour work in your organization?
- Who is doing what and for how long?
- Are there demographic patterns that indicate gender and/or racial bias at play?
- Is the HR, DEI, or office management work being done by someone whose job it isn't?

To do this:

1. Distribute the [Office Housework in Tech Survey](#) to your employees to find out who is doing the office housework and how much of their time it takes up.
2. Convene relevant managers (and anyone else who distributes assignments) to identify what is the glamour work and what is the lower-profile work in the organization. Use the [Assignment Typology Worksheet](#) to create a typology for opportunities, and the [Protocol](#) for more details.
3. Input the information from the typology meeting into the [Manager Assignment Worksheet](#) and distribute to managers. Have managers fill out the worksheets and submit them, identifying who they assign the glamour work and lower-profile work to.

B. Analyze metrics

Analyze survey results and worksheet for demographic patterns, dividing employees into (i) majority men, majority women, men of color, and women of color, (ii) parents who have just returned from parental leave, (iii) professionals working part time or flexible schedules, and (iv) any other historically excluded group that your organization tracks (veterans, LGBTQIA+ people, individuals with disabilities, etc.) Identify:

- Who is doing the office housework?
- Who is doing the glamour work?
- Who is doing the low-profile work?
- Create and analyze metrics by individual supervisor.

2. Implement Bias Interrupters

C. Diversity work interrupters

- **Don't assume** women or people of color can take on DEI work on top of their technical roles.
- **Pay employees** for doing DEI work. This is real work that takes time and benefits the company — it should be compensated as such.
- **Provide administrative support** for people working on women's and diversity initiatives. Then, the technical employee only has to make one call to get the ball rolling, rather than do all of the work on their own.
- **Create Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)** to support a diverse workforce, and provide the groups with adequate support and funding.
- **Consider hiring a DEI director** whose sole job function is to do the DEI work.
- If people of color at your organization are spending more time doing DEI work or mentoring other people of color, indicate that this is valued work. Mentorship service should be compensated and valued in performance evaluations and promotion decisions.

D. Office housework interrupters

- **Don't ask for volunteers.** Women are more likely to volunteer because they are under subtle but powerful pressures to do so.³⁴
- **Hold everyone equally accountable.** “I give it to women because they do it well and the men don't,” is a common sentiment heard from managers. This dynamic reflects an environment in which men suffer few consequences for doing a poor job on office housework, but women who do a poor job are seen as “prima donnas” or “not team players.” Hold men and women equally accountable for carrying out all assignments properly.
- **Use admins.** If possible, assign office housework tasks to admins, e.g. birthday parties, scheduling meetings, ordering lunch.
- **Establish a rotation.** A rotation is also helpful for many administrative tasks (e.g. taking notes, scheduling meetings.) Rotating housework tasks like ordering lunch and planning parties is also an option if admins are unavailable.
- **Shadowing.** Another option for administrative tasks is to assign a more junior person to shadow someone more senior—and take notes.

E. Glamour work interrupters

- **Avoid mixed messages.** If your organization values such things as mentoring and committee work (like serving on the Diversity Initiative), make sure these things are valued when the time comes for promotions and raises. Sometimes organizations say they highly value this kind of work—but they don't. Mixed messages of this kind will negatively affect women and people of color.

- **Conduct a roll-out meeting.** Gather relevant managers and supervisors to introduce the bias interrupters initiative and set expectations using our [key talking points](#).
- Provide a bounceback: identify individual supervisors whose glamour work allocation is lop-sided, hold a meeting with that supervisor, and bring the problem to their attention. Help them think through why they only assign glamour work to certain people or certain types of people. Work with them to figure out if either 1) the available pool for glamour work assignments is diverse but is not being tapped fully, or 2) only a few people have the requisite skills for glamour work assignments. Read the [Responses to Common Pushback](#) and [Identifying Bias in Assignments](#) worksheets before the bounceback meetings to prepare. You may have to address low-profile work explicitly at the same time as you address high-profile assignments; this will vary by organization.

If a diverse pool has the requisite skills...

- **Implement a rotation.** Have the supervisor set up a rotation to ensure fair access to high-profile assignments.
- **Formalize the pool.** Write down the list of people with the requisite skills and make it visible to the supervisor. Sometimes just being reminded of the pool can help.
- **Institute accountability.** Have the supervisor track their allocation of glamour work going forward to measure progress. Research shows that accountability matters.³⁵

If the pool is not diverse...

- **Re-visit the assumption** that only one (or very few) employees can handle this assignment: is that true or is the supervisor in question just more comfortable working with those few people?
- **Analyze how the pool was assembled.** Does the supervisor allocate the glamour work by relying on self-promotion or volunteers? If so, that will often disadvantage women and people of color. Shift to more objective measures to create the pool based on skills and qualifications.

If the above suggestions aren't relevant or don't solve your problem, then it's time to expand the pool:

- **Development plan.** Identify what skills or competencies an employee needs to be eligible for the high-profile assignments and design a plan to help the employee develop the requisite skills.
- **Succession planning.** Remember that having “bench strength” is important so that your department won't be left scrambling if someone unexpectedly leaves the company.

- **Leverage existing HR policies.** If your organization uses a competency-based system, or has a Talent Development Committee or equivalent, that's a resource to help employees develop competencies so that career-enhancing assignments can be allocated more fairly.
- **Shadowing.** Have a more junior person shadow a more experienced person during the high-profile assignment.
- **Mentoring.** Establish a mentoring program to help a broader range of junior people gain access to valued skills.

If you can't expand your pool, re-frame the assignment so that more people could participate in it. Could you break up the assignment into discrete pieces so more people get the experiences they need?

If nothing else works, consider a formal assignment system. Appoint an assignments czar to oversee the distribution of assignments in your organization.

3. Repeat As Needed

Return to your metrics. Did the bias interrupters produce change?

If you still don't have a fair allocation of high- and low-profile work, you may need to implement stronger bias interrupters, or consider moving to a formal assignment system.

Use an iterative process until your metrics improve.

Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations

THE CHALLENGE

A recent study of performance evaluations in tech found that 66% of women's performance reviews contained negative personality criticism ("You come off as abrasive") whereas only 1% of men's reviews did.³⁶ Performance evaluations determine who is eligible for raises, high-profile assignments, and promotions, so it is essential that organizations strive to level the playing field for all employees.

Our study found that women of color in computing reported getting less fair, honest, and constructive performance evaluations than their white counterparts.³⁷ Performance evaluations help determine promotions and compensation, so ensuring fairness in this system will have lasting ripple effects throughout the organization.

THE SOLUTION: A 3-STEP APPROACH

1. Use Metrics

Businesses use metrics to assess whether they have progressed towards any strategic goal. Metrics can help you pinpoint where bias exists, and assess the effectiveness of the measures you've taken. (Whether metrics are made public will vary from organization to organization, and from metric to metric.)

For each metric, examine:

- Do patterned differences exist among majority men, majority women, men of color, and women of color? Include any other historically excluded group that your organization tracks, such as military veterans, LGBTQ+ people, individuals with disabilities, etc.
- Do patterned differences exist for parents after they return from leave, or tech professionals who reduce their hours?
- Do patterned differences exist between full-time and part-time employees?

Important Metrics to Analyze:

Do your performance evaluations show consistent disparities by demographic group?

Do women's ratings fall after they have children? Do employees' ratings fall after they take parental leave or adopt flexible work arrangements?

Do the same performance ratings result in different promotion or compensation rates for different groups?

Keep metrics by: 1) individual supervisor; 2) department; 3) location if relevant; and 4) the organization as a whole.

2. Implement Bias Interrupters

All bias interrupters should apply both to written evaluations and in meetings, where relevant. Because every organization is different, not all interrupters will be relevant. Consider this a menu.

To understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read the [Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Worksheet](#).

Empower and Appoint

Empower people involved in the evaluation process to spot and interrupt bias by using the [Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Worksheet](#). Read and distribute.

Appoint Bias Interrupters. Provide HR professionals or team members with special training to spot bias, and involve them at every step of the performance evaluation process. Training available at [BiasInterrupters.org](#).

Tweak the Evaluation Form

- **Begin with clear and specific performance criteria directly related to job requirements.** Try: “She writes maintainable code, tests her work thoroughly, offers clear and useful suggestions during code reviews, and communicates well with clients to gather requirements,” instead of: “She’s a great programmer.”
- **Require evidence from the evaluation period that justifies the rating.** Try: “This year, he did a great job in helping us win X project, writing a clear client proposal that defined a tight scope and communicated our fee structure in a way that was carefully and strategically considered.” instead of: “He’s great at helping us win projects.”
- **Consider performance and potential separately for each candidate.** Given the tendency for majority men to be judged on their potential while others are judged on their performance, the two criteria should be evaluated separately.
- **Separate personality issues from skill sets for each candidate.** Personal style should be appraised separately from skills because a narrower range of behavior often is accepted from women and people of color. For example, women may be labeled “difficult” for doing things that are accepted in majority men.

Tweak the Evaluation Process

- **Level the playing field when it comes to self-promotion.** Distribute the Writing an Effective Self-Evaluation Worksheet to ensure that everyone knows how to promote themselves effectively and send the message that they are expected to do so.
- **Offer alternatives to self-promotion.** Encourage or require supervisors to set up more formal systems for sharing successes, such as a monthly email that lists employees' accomplishments.
- **Provide a bounceback.** Supervisors whose performance evaluations show persistent bias should receive a bounceback (i.e. someone should talk through the evidence with them).
- **Have Bias Interrupters play an active role in calibration meetings.** In many organizations, managers meet to produce a target distribution of ratings or cross-calibrate rankings. Have managers read the Identifying Bias in Performance Evaluations Worksheet before they meet. Have a trained Bias Interrupter in the room.
- **Don't eliminate your performance appraisal system.** Eliminating formal performance evaluation systems and replacing them with feedback-on-the-fly creates conditions for bias to flourish.

WHAT'S A BOUNCEBACK?

An example: in one organization, when a supervisor's ratings of an underrepresented group deviate dramatically from the mean, the evaluations are returned to the supervisor with the message: either you have an undiagnosed performance problem that requires a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), or you need to take another look at your evaluations as a group. After implementing this bounceback message, the organization found that a few people were put on PIPs—but that over time supervisors' ratings of underrepresented groups converged with those of majority men. A subsequent survey of the organization found that employees of all demographics groups rated their performance evaluations as equally fair (whereas bias was still reported in hiring—and every other business system).

3. Repeat as needed

- Return to your key metrics. Did the bias interrupters produce change?
- If you don't see change, you may need to implement stronger bias interrupters, or you may be targeting the wrong place in the performance evaluation process.
- Use an iterative process until your metrics improve.

Interrupting Bias in Meetings

THE CHALLENGE

Having expertise increases men's influence—but decreases women's.³⁸ This is just one way subtle biases play out in meetings.

Men tend to interrupt in meetings more than women.³⁹ And, sometimes other people get the credit for an idea originally posed by a woman. In our survey, we found that women of color in computing report both interruptions and the stolen idea phenomenon at a much higher rate than their white counterparts.⁴⁰

If organizations don't interrupt bias playing out in meetings, they may lose the talent and insight they pay for.

In addition, as many companies have begun to transition into a hybrid workplace model, it is vital to create an inclusive space. Bias within in-person meetings may also translate and exacerbate within virtual meeting spaces.⁴¹

THE SOLUTION: A 3-STEP APPROACH

1. Use Metrics

Businesses use metrics to assess whether they have progressed towards any strategic goal. Metrics can help you pinpoint where bias exists, and assess the effectiveness of the measures you've taken. (Whether metrics are made public will vary from company to company, and from metric to metric.)

Options for finding out whether you have a problem are listed from least to most time-consuming.

- A. **Employ new technologies:** who is talking during your meetings?
 - GenderEQ: an app that analyzes the ratio of men and women speaking time
- B. **Use our [free 2-minute downloadable survey](#)** to assess bias issues.
- C. **Appoint a Bias Interrupter** to gather metrics over the course of several meetings.
Metrics to gather:
 - Floor time: Who speaks at meetings: is it representative of who attends?

- Interruptions: is there a culture of interrupting in your meetings? If so, is there a gender or racial difference among who does the interrupting and who gets interrupted?
- Stolen idea. Research shows that women and people of color report that others get credit for ideas they originally offered much more than white men do.⁴² Keep track of who gets credit for ideas offered and who originated them.
- Attendees: Are the right people getting invited? Be sure everyone who has a part to play is at the meeting.
- Ideas: whose contributions get lauded or implemented?
- Office housework. Track who takes the notes, who keeps the minutes, who gets coffee, and other office housework tasks.
- Meeting scheduling: are meetings scheduled at times or at locations that make it difficult or impossible for parents and caregivers to attend?

2. Implement Bias Interrupters

Because every organization is different, not all interrupters will be relevant. Consider this a menu.

To understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read our [Identifying Bias in Meetings Worksheet](#) which summarizes hundreds of studies.

- **Rotate office housework tasks.** Women are more likely to be asked to do the “office housework” tasks for meetings: taking notes, scheduling the conference rooms, ordering lunch/snacks for meetings, cleaning up afterwards. If admins are available to do these tasks, use them. If not, don’t ask for volunteers. Instead, figure out a fair way to spread the housework tasks evenly by rotating based on arbitrary criteria (birthday, astrological sign, seniority, etc.) For more bias interrupters about office housework, see the [Identifying Bias in Assignments Worksheet](#).
- **Mind the “stolen idea.”** Make sure people get credit for ideas they offered. When you see ideas get stolen, you can say, “I’ve been thinking about that ever since Pam first said it. You’ve added something important, Eric, here’s the next step.”
- **Avoid personality double-standards.** Make sure women and people of color can speak up without backlash. Decades of research have shown that women face social pressures to hedge (Ex., “Don’t you think?”). Both women and people of color may face backlash for speaking in a direct and assertive manner.⁴³ Have your team read the [Identifying Bias in Meetings Guide](#) to help level the playing field.

- **Ask people to speak up.** Women and people of color often face social pressure to speak in a tentative, deferential manner. If someone isn't speaking up, ask them to weigh in. And if you know someone has expertise in an area, ask them directly.⁴⁴ This strategy can help class migrants and introverts feel included.
- **Have a policy for interruptions.** Create and enforce an overall policy for interruptions. One option is a no-interruptions policy, where you make it clear that interruptions are not to be tolerated, and ding people when they interrupt. A gentler policy is to keep track of who is continually interrupting and getting interrupted, and talk to them later about the problem.
- **Don't give interrupters free reign.** If a few people are dominating the conversation, address it directly. Take them aside and explain that your workplace employs a broad range of people because you need to hear a broad range of viewpoints. Point out that some people are good at "shooting from the hip" while others need to be given more time and space to feel comfortable speaking up. Some may not even realize they're frequent interrupters.
- **Schedule meetings appropriately.** Schedule meetings in the office, not at the golf course. For an off-site, schedule lunch or afternoon coffee. Overall, stick to working hours and professional locations for work meetings. Otherwise, you're putting mothers and other caregivers at a disadvantage.
- **Avoid arranging furniture in ways that signal an in-group.** When there is an inner- and outer-circle of chairs it can create hierarchy.⁴⁵ Pay attention: do all the men sit in the inner circle and the women sit in the outer circle, or is race playing a role? If this happens routinely, have everyone trade places with the person in front of them, or rearrange chairs so there is only one circle.
- **Signal everyone's role.** Let your team know what everyone in the meeting brings to the table.⁴⁶ "Monique has five years of programming experience and I'm excited to have her on this project," or "Sam managed a similar project last spring and we'd like him to run point with the client." When people know the reason behind everyone's inclusion on the project, and their role, it's much easier to have productive and inclusive conversations about the tasks at hand — people are more likely to listen to their ideas and respect their air-time. If you're not sure everyone with influence understands why you've tapped someone into a meeting, be sure to mention it explicitly beforehand.
- **Use gender neutral terms.** When addressing a diverse group, it is best to not use gendered terms such as "ladies and gentleman" or "you guys." Address a diverse group using "you all," "folks," "individuals," "people" and so forth. Encourage the use of pronouns when introducing each other.
- **Establish ground rules for diverse groups.** When meetings are diverse, people may fail to speak up: individuals belonging to in-groups may fear offending individuals in out-groups, while individuals in out-groups may fear rejection or retaliation. To combat this, simply state at the beginning of the meeting that everyone should try their best to speak in a way that's respectful and

mindful of the diversity of experiences represented in your working group (aka “politically correct”). Research shows that this simple statement can decrease uncertainty and increase creativity from participants.⁴⁷

- **Encourage risk takers.** It’s tough to speak up against a majority opinion—especially for someone who’s not in the majority group.⁴⁸ Research shows that people are more likely to voice minority opinions when at least one other person expresses a minority opinion –even if the minority opinions don’t agree with each other.⁴⁹ Some ideas that make it easier to voice minority opinions:
 - State explicitly at the beginning of meetings that you want to hear devil’s advocate ideas.
 - Support people who diverge from the majority. If someone starts to voice an opinion and senses that nobody wants to hear it, s/he will likely pipe down. If you see this happening, say “Let’s hear this idea out.”
- **Empower people** to spot and interrupt bias by reading our [Identifying Bias in Meetings Worksheet](#). Read and distribute the worksheet to help you understand the rationale behind the steps suggested below.

3. Repeat as needed

- Return to your key metrics. Did the bias interrupters produce change?
- If you don’t see change, you may need to implement a stronger bias interrupter.
- Use an iterative process until your metrics improve.

Interrupting Bias in Family Leave

THE CHALLENGE

According to a report by Better Life Lab at New America, nearly half of parents didn't take two days off work after the birth or adoption of a child.⁵⁰ Studies show that paid parental leave can reduce infant mortality rates and improve long-term child and maternal health.⁵¹

Family leave is not just about children. While 30% of Americans say they anticipate needing to take leave to care for a new child, twice as many (60%) say they anticipate needing to take at least some family leave in the future (including caring for ill, disabled, or aging family members).⁵² In fact, one-sixth of Americans spend an average of 20 hours a week caring for a sick or elderly family member.⁵³

The need for family leave policies is already here, and with a rapidly aging population, these needs are only growing.⁵⁴ In order to retain the best workers, companies need to step up and create comprehensive leave and work/life balance policies that work. While employers are expected to comply with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws regarding leaves of absence, employers can and should do more to truly support and retain a diverse workforce with caregiving responsibilities.

The Solution

1. **If you offer disability leave, you need also to offer it for childbirth** (otherwise, that's pregnancy discrimination). Typically, this means that six weeks of leave will be covered by your disability policy for a vaginal birth; eight weeks for the cesarean section.
2. **Determine the maximum paid parental leave your organization can afford.** Keep in mind that typically few employees will have children in any given year, but that without paid leave you will often lose one employee after another when they have children. Don't assume you will only lose women; increasingly,

FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

FMLA requires employees to give their employer 30 days' notice prior to leave that is foreseeable. Ideally, your employees who can foresee their need for leave will notify you at the same time that they notify their larger network of friends. By creating a workplace culture that is welcoming and encouraging of taking leave, employees will be more likely to give you notice earlier in the process. Consider adding this model policy into your employee handbook and reference leave availability and your leave transition process in employee onboarding trainings to set the right tone from the start.

we hear from men who insist on taking parental leave and walk away from companies that don't provide it (although men often don't tell the companies they're leaving for this reason). Some states have paid laws to help cover the company's costs and extend the available paid leave time.⁵⁵

3. **Offer equal parental (not “primary caregiver”) leave and allow intermittent leave.** So-called “primary caregiver” leave reflects a breadwinner/homemaker model that does not fit most families today, and opens an organization up to potential liability if someone openly states that primary caregivers are expected to be women, not men. Determine the amount of time your organization can afford to offer equal parental leave to all parents, regardless of gender, and adoptive as well as birth parents. Also, allow leave to be taken in small chunks rather than all at once; leave takers can work with their supervisors to create schedules that work for their teams.
4. **Offer equal leave for everyone, including hourly workers (who are typically less able to afford replacement care).** Again, paid parental leave is critical for helping families balance work and caregiving responsibilities, and is tied to better maternal and child health.
5. **Offer leave for all types of caregiving responsibilities.** Offering leave only to parents risks breeding resentment on the part of those who need to care for elders, or a family member with a disability or illness. If your organization is worried that non-birth-related caregiving leave will be abused, require permission from HR or supervisors to ensure substantial caregiving responsibilities exist.
6. **Set strong norms that everyone is expected to take their entire paid leave for childbirth/adoption.** Leaders need to send a strong message that employees are expected to take the full amount of paid leave available to them, and that taking additional unpaid leave will not count against them. The best way to do this is to celebrate a pregnancy/adoption announcement (for employees of all gender identities) by offering a company-logo onesie and group announcement signaling that children are something to be celebrated, not hidden. Once that norm is set, pregnancy/adoption announcements can be followed by having HR (or supervisors, if they are on-message) tell men as well as women that they are expected to take their full leave. Supervisors may need training to do this effectively. If there is a cultural expectation to come back early, then that is exactly what most employees will do. If men are not taking leave, your messaging is not effective, and men who want work-life balance are likely leaving your company for this reason.
7. **Eliminate the flexibility stigma.** Effective policies depend on cultural shifts in your organization. If you tell employees– and you should — that taking leave won't undercut their progress in the organization, then walk the talk. Make sure to plan for leaves effectively so that employees don't feel slighted when they return, and their colleagues don't feel like they are taking on undue burdens.

8. **Don't violate the Family and Medical Leave Act.** It is illegal to interfere with or discourage any employee, regardless of gender, from taking leave under the FMLA. Although employers are not completely forbidden from contacting employees while they are on leave, these calls should be limited to brief, necessary business-related calls. Communications to return to work early, weekly status checks, or calls to perform work while on leave can make an employer liable for interference with FMLA rights.⁵⁶ Calls to employees out on leave should be managed through Human Resources. It is illegal to penalize employees for requesting or taking leave, either before or after they do so.

9. **Use a three-meeting model for off-ramping.** Effective on- and off-ramping is vital, both to ensure smooth transitions and to eliminate the flexibility stigma.
 - After a pregnancy announcement, the employee's supervisor should ask for a meeting, congratulate the future parent, hand out the company onesie (see # 6 above), and say: "We expect everyone to take their full paid leave—and the entire amount of unpaid leave available to them if they wish. We will develop a transition plan that works for you." At the initial meeting, assign a leave liaison if you have that program (see. #12 below).

If your employee is an adopting or foster parent, or if your employee is taking family leave for elder care or medical reasons, the two meetings may be on an accelerated schedule.
 - Three months before the leave is set to start, the employee's supervisor should schedule a meeting, saying: "Come prepared with a list of all your ongoing projects and who you think might be a good fit to take them while you're on leave. If no one comes to mind, don't worry. We can figure it out together at the meeting, even if we need to hire temporary help—your list is just a jumping off point."
 - Shortly before the expected leave date arrives, meet again to finalize the plan for transitioning job duties. The supervisor should ask about the employee's thoughts about post leave (understanding that plans may change). Are they thinking about returning on a part-time or flex schedule? For equity and legal reasons, make sure everyone taking family leave, regardless of gender, is asked the same questions.

10. **Don't forget to ramp up when they return.** Often women return from maternity leave and find it is very difficult to gradually work up to their previous workload due to assumptions that they have limited time, and perhaps limited commitment, to work. That's why it's important to schedule a meeting immediately when someone returns, with at least two weekly check-ins thereafter, to ensure that an employee returning from leave isn't being sidelined for projects because colleagues are benevolently (or not so benevolently) concerned about the returned employee's workload. Doing this helps avoid attrition—and helps prevent maternal wall bias from becoming a legal problem.

11. **The best practice is a gradual-return-to-work policy.** The best way to ensure that employees do not return to an overwhelming wall of work, and end up leaving the company, is a gradual-return-to-work policy. Typically these start with a 50% schedule and gradually build back to full-time. Without a formal policy, companies often find that some supervisors handle the return-to-work well, but that others do so poorly, resulting in high attrition.
12. **Designate leave liaisons.** Create a workplace mentorship program that links leave-takers with mentor colleagues. Mentors then act as guides on issues like off- and on-ramping and the transition into parenthood. Some organizations expand these programs by offering employees outside coaching sessions or classes for new parents and paid travel expenses for care support, enabling parents to bring their children on work-related travel. See #9 for more ideas.
13. **Broaden the scope of support.** Organizations can continue to support all employees beyond leave by offering family caregiving benefits. To start, here are some ideas:
 - Flexible and part-time schedules, see our Toolkit for Workplace Flexibility for guidance.
 - Get your employees a membership for regular or back-up childcare through providers like Care@Work, or better yet, offer on-site childcare.
 - You can also offer eldercare services through providers like Bright Horizons.
 - Help employees navigate pregnancy and postpartum with platforms like Mahmee or Maven.
 - Offer a travel allowance for caregivers on work-related travel and breastmilk overnight mailing services.
14. **Schedule the time to review your family leave and work/life balance policies.** Like anything else that's a priority, add discussions on these policies to your strategic plan and budget meetings.

Interrupting Bias in Workplace Flexibility

THE CHALLENGE

Surveys show time and time again that employees want more flexibility at work, with one finding that 96% of white-collar professionals say they need flexibility.⁵⁷ Workers value workplaces that value them. In one study, attrition was cut in half when workers went remote, and telecommuting employees took fewer sick days and less time off.⁵⁸

There is ample evidence that women professionals do have more caregiving responsibilities than male professionals as a group,⁵⁹ although increasing numbers of younger men are equal caregivers and are willing to leave their employers for reasons of work-life balance.⁶⁰ So, it is in the employers' best interest to retain not only women but all young people by providing time flexibility in the workplace.

When workplaces rely on an outdated model of a breadwinner who is always available for work, not only do they exclude most people working today, they also hurt the company's bottom line. According to Cisco, their mobile or remote employees have a voluntary attrition rate a third the size of their office-based employees.⁶¹ Cisco credits this lower attrition rate with \$75 million in annual savings for recruiting, hiring, and training replacements.⁶² Other studies have found sharp gains in productivity when workplaces move to telework or build-your-own schedules.⁶³

In our study of women of color in computing, we found that women already thought that asking for flexible arrangements would hurt their careers.⁶⁴ This data was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic forced many workers into months or years of remote work, and the long-term impact of the pandemic remains to be seen.

Building a flexible workplace enables employers to promote people based on their talent instead of their schedule.

THE SOLUTION

1. **Recognize the difference between crisis work and full-time/part-time telework.** Working remotely in the midst of a crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic, is not the same as telework during normal times. The first steps to successful telework are childcare and a place to work. Organizations designing a permanent telework scheme typically will balance the productivity gains of telework with

the innovation gains of in-office work. For tips on creating a telework policy that works for your organization visit: <https://trello.com/remote-work-guide>.⁶⁵

2. **Allow for flex time.** Flex times allows employees to start and end work at times of their own choosing, often within limits (e.g. start times between 7-11 a.m.). Don't assume hourly employees can't participate: having one receptionist work 8-5 and another work 9-6, for example, often benefits an organization.
3. **Use reduced schedules to expand your talent pool.** Offer reduced scheduling to employees without compromising career advancement opportunities by offering proportional pay, benefits, and advancement. This strategy has been used successfully in law firms, enabling part-time attorneys to become partners. Only 18.2% of professional women and less than one-third of men work more than 40 hours per week, so if your workplace isn't offering a reduced schedule with advancement opportunities, you're missing out.⁶⁶
4. **Consider offering a wider range of work arrangements.** Are you able to make some positions project-based? This enables employees to take on as much or as little work as they want, giving the company their best on select projects. Elite part-time track programs that continue to offer glamour work assignments to employees with lower hours help level the playing field and ensure that the plum work opportunities continue going to the best-suited for the job. What makes these programs effective is that employees are still able to transition into more senior roles within the organization.
5. **Eliminate the flexibility stigma.** Don't stigmatize people based on schedule. Message clearly and often that promotion depends on talent and work, not on "face time" at the office—and practice what you preach.
6. **Don't overvalue overwork.** Encouraging your employees to regularly burn the midnight oil hurts more than it helps. Studies dating back to WWI find that chronic overwork (more than 40 hours a week) hurts productivity and more recent studies find that working less than 40 hours a week can increase productivity.⁶⁷ In one study, managers couldn't tell the difference between employees who actually worked 80 hours a week and those who pretended to.⁶⁸ Pay attention to what an employee's efforts lead to, not how many hours it takes them to get there.
7. **Your benefits send a message; make sure it's the one you want.** Look again at your work culture and employee benefits. Do they match up with the work-life balance values your company claims? Having a power-napping room, dry-cleaning, and free dinner for those who work after 8 p.m. are great, but if those are your only employee benefits, you are sending a strong message that you only value a certain group of employees. Provide a range of benefits that will appeal to employees from different demographics if that's what you want to attract and retain.

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