5 common performance management biases

Recency bias

Primacy bias

Distance bias

Similarity bias

Leniency bias

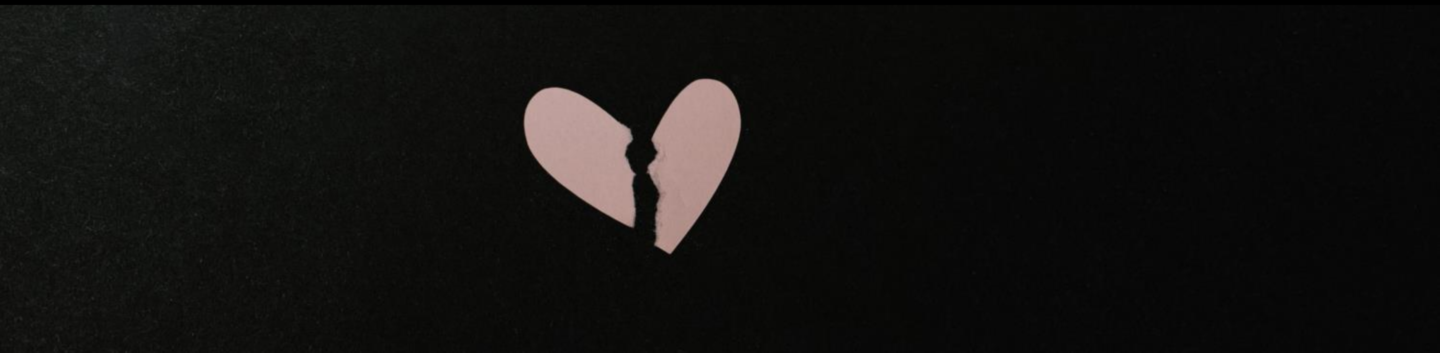
Find out more

Source: emPerform

1 Recency bias

This is a type of cognitive bias when you easily recall and place too much emphasis on the employee’s most recent work rather than considering their performance throughout the entire year. This sets the stage for a distorted view of the employee’s actual overall performance — magnifying their strengths or shortcomings, both of which aren’t true to reality.

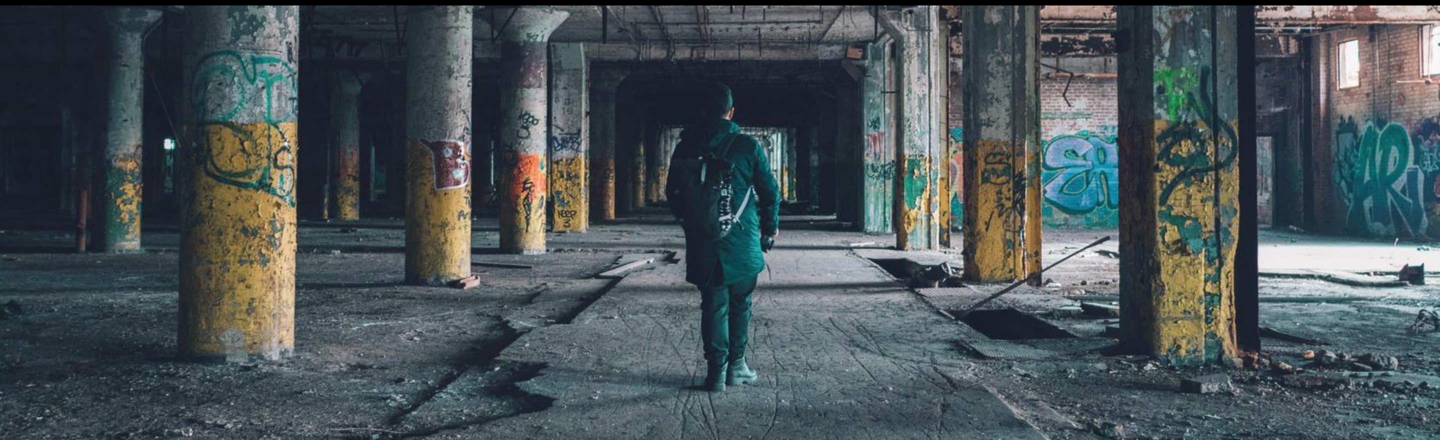
Recency bias leads to the employee either feeling overvalued or undervalued for their work. It’s particularly harsh for those who genuinely worked hard over a period of time and then had a couple of bad days!



2 Primacy bias

Primacy bias is also known as anchoring bias. It's another cognitive bias that encourages managers to consider partial information to form an overall evaluation.

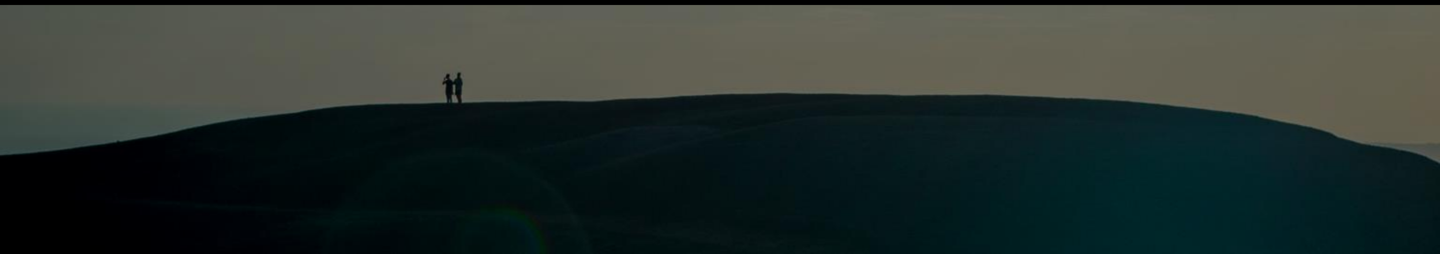
In primacy bias, a negative or positive opinion is formed about an employee exclusively based on their performance on their first few projects, or more frequently, on a first impression. Even if the employee is one of the strongest performers in the team, that first impression will cloud the manager's view of the employee.



3 Distance bias

Distance bias refers to the brain's tendency to favour people or events that are closer to us. This is a massive problem for remote teams or hybrid teams that have remote employees peppered in. Out of sight is considered out of mind. Amidst the pandemic, with office shut-downs being implemented widely to flatten the COVID-19 curve and to keep people healthy, it's near impossible to keep employees always in sight.

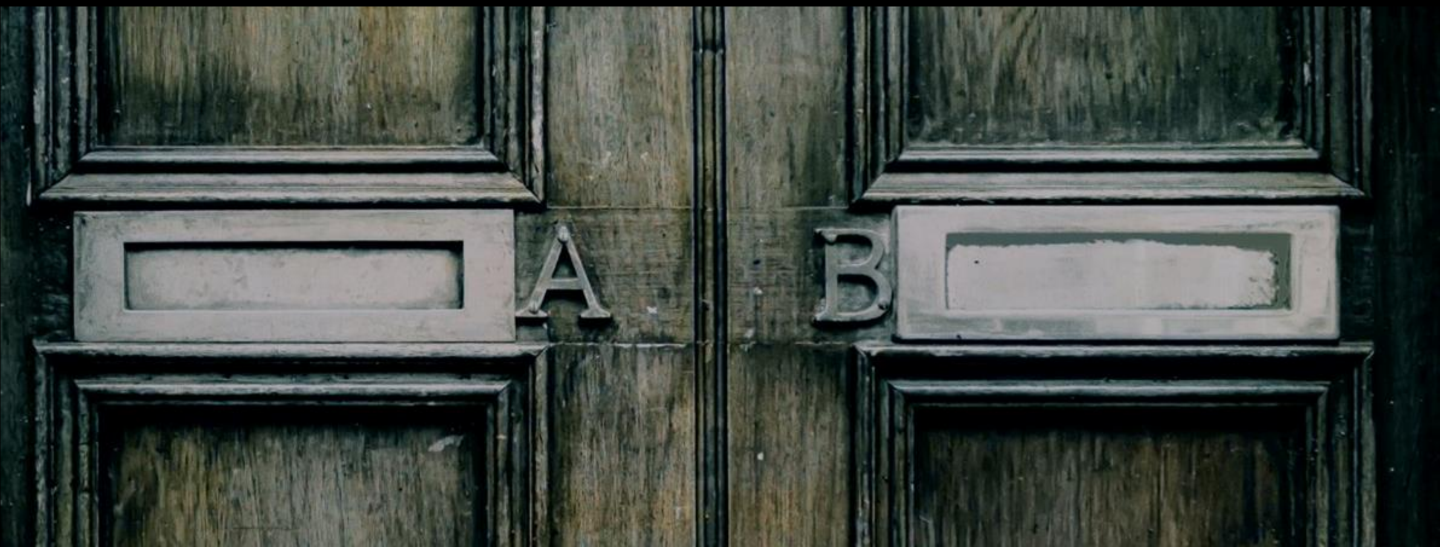
Distance bias translates to inaccurate evaluations that differ based on locations — in-office employees are valued more than the geographically dispersed worker. Remotely, this may come into play if a manager happens to be grouped into many meetings and/or projects with some employees and not others.



4 Similarity bias

We tend to like what resembles us — ‘mini-me’s.’ This springs our natural tendency to categorise others based on different variables. For example, if we are religious, we will look favourably upon those who are equally devout or share the same values.

In the same vein, employees may be grouped based on gender, skin colour, where they’re from, their likes, dislikes, working habits etc. If they don’t seem like “one of us,” their evaluation suffers.

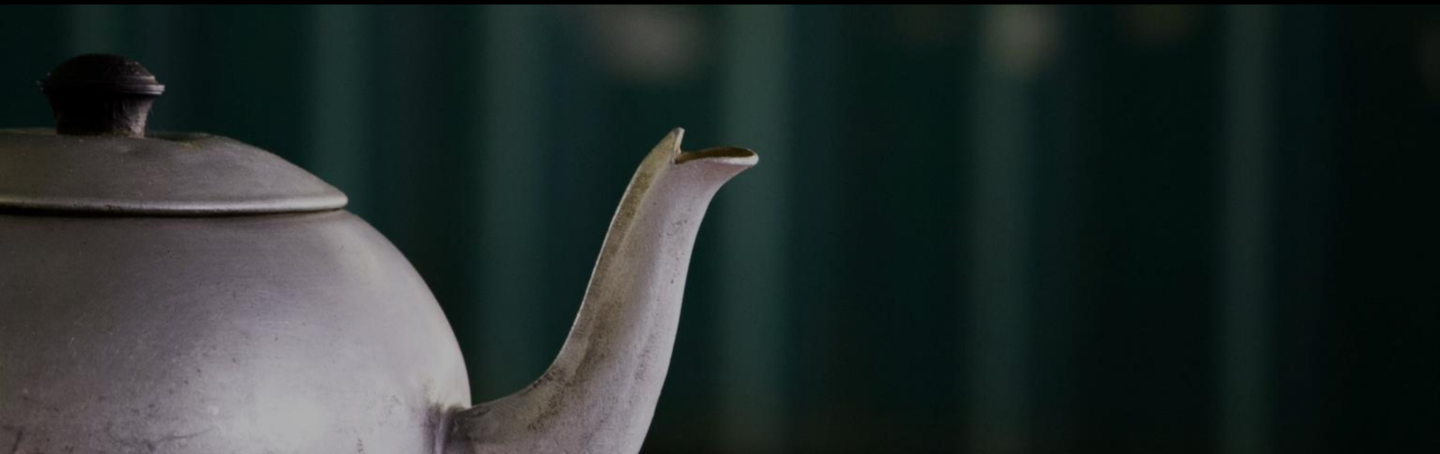


5 Leniency bias

No one wants to be the cause of pain for someone else.

Managers don't either. This is why the leniency bias exists. When a manager is predisposed to be lenient to all employees or a specific employee during performance reviews, it results in obscured, inflated, and incorrect feedback.

There are several reasons why this occurs beyond the apparent possibility of an existing relationship between the manager and the employee.



Think about your thinking.

What biases might you be falling foul of on a daily basis?