Common Distortions

Regardless of the review system used, a variety of common rater errors exist. To varying degrees, they are inevitable, but it’s important that we do our best to minimize their effects.

## Lack of Differentiation

Because raters often lack the confidence to defend their ratings or are reluctant to pass judgment, they may rate everyone pretty much the same. This approach can take the form of leniency (everyone gets high ratings), severity (everyone gets low ratings) or a universal feeling that everyone is doing just fine (and everyone gets rated in the middle).

## Inaccurate Information

Managers sometimes fail to take the time to solicit relevant information about the employee's actual performance from those who work most directly with the employee, resulting in an inaccurate assessment.

## Recency Effect

When managers are not diligent in continuously measuring performance, providing feedback and documenting results, they often cannot remember the earlier part of the performance period. As a result, they weigh the most recent events too heavily.

## Halo/Horns Effect

The "halo" and "horns" effects occur when an employee is highly competent or incompetent in one area, respectively, and the supervisor rates the employee correspondingly high or low in all areas.

## Personal Bias/Favoritism

Some managers may allow their impressions of employees or their personal feelings about them to dominate the performance rating process.

## Unconscious Group Bias

Everyone has group biases that they’re not aware of. The most well-known expression of such distortion is a “hostile bias,” where an individual treats a member of a group toward which they are biased poorly. Less-acknowledged is “benevolent bias,” in which an individual treats a member of a group toward which they are biased with kid gloves. Both are forms of inequality.