Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Supervisors as Change Agents is for supervisors who wish to become change agents in their organizations. The materials are focused on actions that you as an individual supervisor can take to raise awareness and motivate change. Of course, supervisors cannot “do it all,” but these individual efforts are often what it takes to spark change. The materials here also point to other NCWIT resources that can help with planning more systemic, department, or company-wide change at later stages.

Authors | Catherine Ashcraft and Sarah Blithe
Unfair treatment and subtle forms of bias drive more than two million employees a year to leave their jobs, according to a survey of 1700 professionals conducted by the Level Playing Field Institute. Organizations that assume their supervisory relationships and work environments adequately foster productivity and innovation might be losing important talent and limiting their capacity for real accomplishments.

Are you looking for practical resources to help you develop and supervise a high-performing, diverse, technical team? Is your organization eager to realize the full potential of its employees? Even if your institution already has a formal training program for supervisors, Supervising-in-a-Box is for you.

WHAT’S IN THE FIVE-PART SERIES?

The Supervising-in-a-Box Series provides resources for addressing unconscious bias and institutional barriers that affect five different supervisory job functions. Each box focuses on one job function. The different boxes in the Supervising Series are:

- **Employee Recruitment/Selection** focusing on hiring the best talent.
- **Employee Development** focusing on ensuring that employees contribute their best ideas and talents to the team.
- **Team/Project Management** focusing on running an effective, innovative, and productive team.
- **Performance Review/Talent Management** focusing on equitably advancing the best talent.
- **Supervisors as Change Agents** focusing on working for cultural reform with other managers and company leaders.
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*Supervising-in-a-Box Series* was developed in collaboration with the Level Playing Field Institute (LPFI). LPFI promotes innovative approaches to fairness in higher education and workplaces by removing barriers to full participation. For more information see [www.lpfi.org](http://www.lpfi.org).

*Supervising-in-a-Box Series is sponsored and created by the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT), NCWIT’s Workforce Alliance, and the Workforce Alliance Practices Committee.*
TALKING POINTS

Use these tools to help you talk with senior leaders or other colleagues about the business case for increasing diverse participation and other important issues related to diversity and technology.

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How Do I Talk About the Business Case for Increasing Diverse Participation?

**FIRST, HIGHLIGHT THE GOOD NEWS: COMPUTING OCCUPATIONS ARE AMONG THE FASTEST-GROWING OCCUPATIONS**

- Technical innovation will be essential in nearly every sector of the economy.
- Computing occupations are among the top 10 fastest-growing professions.
- The U.S. workforce will add more than 1.4 million computer specialist jobs by 2018.
- These trends pose an exciting opportunity for technical companies and the future of technical innovation.

But along with this opportunity comes some significant risks. Highlight the risks below.

**RISK 1: A SHRINKING TALENT POOL**

*The technology industry is failing to attract future talent.*

- If current trends continue, the technology industry will only be able to fill half of the 1.4 million available jobs by 2018.
- Participation is declining overall, but particularly among women; in 2009, only 25% of all professional IT occupations were held by women, down from 37% in 1996.
RISK 1: A SHRINKING TALENT POOL (CONTINUED)

The industry is also losing important talent already interested in technology.

- 74% of women in the private science and technology workforce say that they love their work; yet 56% leave at the “mid-level.”

- 75% of the women who leave continue working. At least 50% of the women who leave continue to use their technical training outside of the private sector.

- This is a costly loss. The average cost of replacing a technical employee is estimated at $150,000-$200,000.

- Intervening before these women left would have retained up to 660,000 women in the private scientific and technology workforce.

RISK 2: REDUCED INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS

Diversity improves innovation, company performance, and customer satisfaction; companies without this diversity will fall behind.

- In a study of more than 100 teams at 21 companies, teams with equal numbers of women and men were more likely to experiment, be creative, share knowledge, and fulfill tasks than teams of any other composition.¹

- Mixed-sex teams produce IT patents that are cited 26 to 42 percent more often than the norm.²

RISK 2: REDUCED INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS (CONTINUED)

A study of more than 500 U.S. based businesses found that teams with higher racial and gender diversity had increased sales revenue, more customers, greater market share, and greater profits than companies with lower levels of racial and gender diversity. Racial diversity was one of the most important predictors of a company’s competitive standing in its industry.³

Additional studies indicate that, under the right conditions, teams comprising diverse members consistently outperform teams comprising “highest-ability” members.⁴

RETURN TO THE GOOD NEWS: CURRENT TRENDS CAN BE REVERSED

We have extensive research on the primary reasons women leave and we know what to do about it. NCWIT has a number of practical resources that identify these barriers, and practices for addressing them; in particular, see Women in IT: The Facts available at www.ncwit.org/thefacts and Strategic Planning for Increasing Women’s Participation in the Computing Industry available at www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook).

CLOSE WITH A REMINDER ABOUT THE VALUE PROPOSITION: ATTRACTING AND RETAINING MORE WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY WILL...

Create a stronger workforce and lower attrition costs.

Increase innovation, efficiency, and productivity.

Produce products that better reflect the customer base.

Improve financial gains and the bottom line.

³ Cedric Herring, Workforce Diversity Pays, 2009.
TALKING POINTS

How Do I Talk About the Key Barriers to Retaining Women in Technology?

BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHAT THE KEY BARRIERS ARE...

Although 74% of women in technology say that they love their work, 56% leave by the time they reach the mid-level (approximately somewhere between 10-20 years in a career).

A great deal of research has identified five primary reasons women leave:

» Isolation: Lack of mentors, sponsors & professional development opportunities

» Poor supervisory relationships

» Bias in performance reviews and promotion

» Lack of support for competing life responsibilities

» Unconscious biases in everyday instances and interactions

For a summary of research on each of these barriers, see NCWIT’s report, Women in IT: The Facts available at www.ncwit.org/thefacts.
MOST IMPORTANTLY, HIGHLIGHT SOLUTIONS

Stress that piecemeal efforts are not enough; it takes an “ecosystem” approach to adequately address these barriers. The model below illustrates the key components of a company’s environment that need to be addressed in order to accomplish sustained change when it comes to increasing diverse participation.

Top leadership support and supervisory relationships are at the center of the model because without these elements, efforts in all other areas will be less effective.

For more information on implementing strategies in these areas, see NCWIT’s industry workbook, Strategic Planning for Increasing Women’s Participation in the Computing Industry available at www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook.
How Do I Talk About Institutional Barriers and Their Effects?

WHAT ARE INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS (IBs)?

IBs are policies, procedures, or situations that systematically disadvantage certain groups of people.

IBs exist in any majority-minority group context. When an initial population is fairly similar (e.g., in male-dominated professions), systems naturally emerge to meet the needs of this population. If these systems do not change with the times, they can inhibit the success of new members with different needs.

IBs often seem natural or “just the way things are around here.”

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF IBs?

Assigning valued or important job tasks using criteria that favor certain groups (e.g., is in the office later at night, doesn’t have children; placing a higher value on stereotypically “masculine” tasks and/or assigning these to men more often).

Making decisions or having important conversations in informal situations where some employees find it more difficult to participate (e.g., golf course, bar).

Rigid schedules that make managing family (or other) responsibilities difficult — especially when these responsibilities tend to fall more heavily on certain groups (e.g., women).
**Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Supervisors as Change Agents**

**Talking Points**

ncwit.org

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**Why Are IBs a Problem for Organizations?**

Because institutional barriers seem natural, they are difficult to detect. Instead, individuals are blamed for failures or difficulties that actually result from these barriers. These individuals are seen as needing “special” help or “accommodations”; however, these “accommodations” would most likely have been norms had these individuals been part of the original culture. Failing to recognize and address these systems leads to increased employee turnover and hinders company productivity, innovation, and competitiveness.

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**Responses to Common Misperceptions**

**Institutional Barriers (IBs) Are Not About Blame.**

Stress that identifying institutional barriers is NOT about finding fault or ill intent. Institutional barriers naturally arise and need to be addressed in almost all majority-minority situations. Using a problem-solving approach can avoid a defensive reaction, especially when evidence is presented.

**IBs Are Not the Same As Individual Bias.**

Explain that simply removing individual prejudice or bias will not level the playing field. Organizations must actively dismantle systems that seem natural but continue to disadvantage certain groups.

**IBs Are Not Simply the Result of Individual “Choices.”**

This view is sometimes reflected in comments such as “Most women I know prefer or choose to spend more time with the children.” Point out that “choice” is a relative term; women often make these “choices” because they have few or no alternatives. When men share family responsibilities equally, women frequently make different “choices.” Organizations can develop systems that address these problems, allowing them to benefit from diverse participation.
**TALKING POINTS**

How Do I Talk to Colleagues About Unconscious Bias and Its Effects?

**WHAT IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND HOW DOES IT WORK?**

» We all have “knowledge schemas” that shape our understandings and beliefs about the world around us. For example, we have schemas for what a “mall” or a “car” looks like. These schemas mean we do not have to start from scratch attempting to figure out what these items are; we can recognize them immediately. We also have schemas for more complex concepts, such as what makes a “leader” or a “good technical person.”

» These schemas are normal and necessary for us to live; if we did not have them, we would be overwhelmed and unable to digest all of the information we encounter on a daily basis.

» These schemas, however, also result in unconscious biases that cause us to miss important information or to misread certain situations (e.g., we think that we remember a certain store in a mall when it actually isn’t there; we pass over employees who would make excellent leaders because they do not fit our existing “leader” schema).

**WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES I CAN GIVE OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND ITS EFFECTS?**

» In a study of job applicants, women had to exhibit 99 “impact factors” to be rated as high as men who exhibited only 20 “impact factors.”

» Resumes with stereotypically white names, such as Emily and Greg, receive 50% more call backs than equivalent resumes with stereotypically black names, such as Lakisha or Jamal.
WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES I CAN GIVE OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND ITS EFFECTS? (CONTINUED)

Business students at Columbia University were given a written profile of a (real-life) very successful technical woman, Heidi Roizen. All of the students read the same profile but for half of the class the person was named Heidi while for the other half the person was named Howard. Both male and female students rated Howard as more likeable, more likely to be hired, and more like someone they would want to emulate than Heidi. Heidi, on the other hand, was rated as more self-promoting, disingenuous, and “power-hungry.”

Since the 1970s, many orchestras have conducted “blind” auditions with performers shielded from the judges by a curtain. This simple change has increased the chances that a woman would advance out of preliminary rounds by 50% and has significantly increased the likelihood that she would ultimately be hired.

HOW DO I TALK ABOUT THE COST OF UNCONSCIOUS BIAS FOR TECHNICAL ORGANIZATIONS?

The Business Case for Addressing Biases: More than 2 million employees a year report leaving their jobs due solely to unfairness resulting from unconscious biases. Research also shows that biases are particularly prevalent in environments dominated by a single group, such as computing or technology environments. The cost of replacing a technical employee is conservatively estimated at approximately $150,000-$200,000.
HOW DO I TALK ABOUT SOLUTIONS OR WAYS TO ADDRESS THESE BIASES?

The Good News: We can expand our schemas and become better at identifying unconscious biases. Raising awareness about unconscious biases and how they work is the first step. Using practical resources to reduce or eliminate these biases is the next step. Check out the resources below to get started!

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:


Level Playing Field Institute, LPFI conducts research into unconscious bias in the workplace. They can help you create real-life video vignettes to use for discussion and training purposes. They also have other resources and opportunities to participate in research on unconscious bias. Contact info: www.lpfi.org.

Implicit Association Test: Use this engaging and compelling interactive test to measure your own biases. The test makes for a stimulating discussion or training tool. Available at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/.
How Can I Talk to Colleagues About Stereotype Threat?

WHAT IS STEREOTYPE THREAT?

Stereotype threat is the fear that our performance will confirm negative stereotypes about a group to which we belong (e.g., women). Stereotype threat raises anxiety, reduces confidence and risk-taking, and lowers performance.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF STEREOTYPE THREAT?

The effects of stereotype threat have been proven over and over in studies.

- African Americans perform worse on tests when racial stereotypes about intelligence are invoked ahead of time.\(^5\)
- Women perform worse on math tests when gender/math stereotypes are called to their attention.\(^6\)
- White male engineering students at Stanford scored lower when told in advance that Asians typically score higher on math tests.\(^7\)

Living with these stereotypes builds this threat and intensifies the effects over time. But as the last example above shows, it doesn't even take a history of being stigmatized to invoke stereotype threat. It can happen in a single instance.

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\(^6\) Good, Aronson & Harder, 2008.
\(^7\) Aronson, 1999, When White Men Can't Do Math.
WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO REDUCE STEREOTYPE THREAT?

The good news is that stereotype threat is NOT innate; it can be reduced.

» Question when you or others have interpretations such as, “so-and-so is just not a risk-taker”; consider more complex interpretations and encourage others to do so too.

» Provide encouragement as appropriate. Never underestimate the power of simply encouraging others to take on a project or apply for a position you think they are qualified to do.

» “Sponsor” underrepresented groups on the technical career path; note that this is not the same as mentoring. Sponsoring involves actively making someone’s accomplishments visible in contexts where it counts.

» Explain the difference between incremental and entity views of intelligence or ability. A useful way to do this is to explain that intelligence and technical abilities are much more like muscles than innate characteristics or abilities. Like a muscle they can be developed with use. This helps dispel the myth that people are “born technical” and bolsters confidence in those who may be affected by stereotype threat.

» Ask yourself whether you may have been affected by stereotype threat; examine your actions for potentially self-limiting behaviors.

» Educate supervisors and other employees about stereotype threat, its effects, and how to reduce it.

For more information and resources, see www.ncwit.org/stereotypethreat and www.reducingstereotypethreat.org.
TALKING POINTS

Intervening in Difficult Moments — What to Say When a Colleague Says...

The following comments are examples of common mistakes that are made in diverse groups. Potential responses are provided so that you might be able to better intervene in these moments. Please remember these are suggested responses; you may wish to modify these responses to fit your style or your company context.

“We’re so excited to have you on board; we’ve really needed someone like you to help us understand the Hispanic market.”

PROBLEM: TOKENISM

Tokenism includes comments or actions that suggest that one person can speak for or relate to an entire identity group (e.g., women, Hispanics). The reality is that a wide range of variation exists within any identity group and that it is unreasonable to expect one person to represent this within-group variation; for example, rarely do we expect a white person to speak for all whites or a man to speak for all men.

POTENTIAL RESPONSE:

“It’s great that you’re making the effort to make (name of employee) feel welcome. One thing to keep in mind though is that we really can’t expect one person to speak for all Hispanics (or other groups). As you might imagine, there is a lot of variation within these groups. It’s easy to make this mistake when you are trying to gather feedback from people different from you, but it can get quite tiresome for the person being asked these questions or make them feel unwelcome even though that’s not the intent. It’s this phenomenon called “tokenism.” It’s better to implement ways to frequently gather all employees’ feedback on particular team decisions or strategies; that way they can contribute wherever and whenever they feel they can. If you want to check with an employee to see if they want to head up a certain market or product, you might privately ask whether they would be interested in doing so but don’t assume that they will just because they belong to a particular group.”
“I don’t see color or gender; if you do your work well on my team, you’ll succeed!”

PROBLEM: GENDER- OR COLOR-BLINDNESS

A gender- or color-blind stance would be appropriate if the larger society also were gender- and color-blind. Since this is not yet the case, holding such a stance ignores current realities. Women and people of color often have experiences that shape their lives differently (e.g., they face different unconscious biases; women more often than men have to think about or are asked to explain how they balance work and family responsibilities). Treating everyone “the same” ignores these realities and the fact that existing workplace conditions do not meet these employees’ needs. It also ignores the fact that current workplace conditions are not natural; they have subtly evolved to meet the needs of the original population. This is especially the case in organizations where the original population was a relatively similar group of people (e.g., men, women, whites).

POTENTIAL RESPONSE:

I know it seems like that is a good — or even ideal — approach! Part of the problem with it though is that it is, in fact, “ideal” — it ignores current realities. If society also didn’t see gender or color, such an approach might make perfect sense. But we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that society does see these factors and that people are often treated differently or have different life experiences because of them. Also they are sometimes expected to take on different tasks — whether consciously or unconsciously (e.g., women taking on more family responsibilities). As long as this is the case, “treating everyone the same” isn’t always the right or “fair” approach.
“Well, we’ve been getting pressure to diversify management, so we better give her a shot even if she’s not quite ready?”

PROBLEM: THE GLASS CLIFF

This phenomenon occurs when members from underrepresented groups are promoted too early or put in charge of tasks they do not yet have the expertise or the authority to carry out. While these decisions may be well-intentioned, they actually set these employees up to fail and are detrimental to the long-term interest of the company, to the employee’s own interest, and to future efforts for hiring and retaining diverse employees. Another way this phenomenon shows up is by giving members from underrepresented groups more “risky” projects where they are more likely to become a “scapegoat” even though this is not reflective of their actual ability; the project was just riskier.

POTENTIAL RESPONSE:

Well, I agree it’s important to diversity our leadership, but we really need to be careful that we do so in ways that don’t set people up to fail. This often happens when people are trying to promote underrepresented groups; it’s a phenomenon called the “glass cliff,” and it ultimately hurts both the employee and the company more than it helps. If an employee isn’t ready but we think they are a promising future leader, we need to let them know that, clearly articulate the steps they need to get to that point, and make it possible for them to take these steps.

If you hear or see a colleague engage in any of these behaviors, speak up! Often a polite, private conversation or an email about these issues will spark change, as tokenism, the glass cliff, and gender or color-blindness are often unintentional. Make sure you are direct yet gentle and approach your colleague at a convenient time. Also see pages 39-46 in the Appendix for more detail and sample scenarios related to these concepts.
TIP SHEETS

These pages discuss a number of important points to consider when trying to motivate organizational change. Use this section to inform your own efforts toward change.

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» Tip Sheet: Reactions to Change .......................................................................................................................... 24
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TIP SHEET

Ideas for Raising Awareness and Sharing Resources

WITH YOUR TEAM OR OTHERS WITH WHOM YOU HAVE MORE DIRECT INFLUENCE

1. **Make changes where you can.** Use the resources throughout the other four supervising boxes to make changes or implement practices that reduce biases within your own team.

2. **Distribute tips or fact “tidbits.”** Send weekly or monthly emails or include blurbs in newsletters (or other office communication) that highlight a tip or fact from the resources in the *Supervising Box Series*. You might also draw from other NCWIT resources such as *By the Numbers*, the *Scorecard*, and the *Women in IT: The Facts* report, all available at [www.ncwit.org/resources](http://www.ncwit.org/resources).

3. **Conduct informational sessions.** Host a “brown bag” or similar type of session to discuss some of the issues raised in this box. See the Appendix for especially useful materials for discussion.

4. **Strategically display resources.** If possible or appropriate, leave resources such as the talking points in this box, NCWIT *By the Numbers*, or the “Business Case” for *Women in Technology* (available as a pdf along with the full report, *Women in IT: The Facts*, at [www.ncwit.org/thefacts](http://www.ncwit.org/thefacts)) in central offices or other places that display public information (e.g., the reception desk, bulletin boards, common areas). This helps spark informal discussion in spontaneous moments. It also allows people to pick these materials up inconspicuously and communicates to outsiders or future employees that this is an organization interested in addressing these issues.

WITH OTHERS BEYOND YOUR IMMEDIATE CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE (E.G., HUMAN RESOURCES, OTHER DEPARTMENTS, OTHER LEADERS/SUPERVISORS)

1. **Pass along resources to enhance HR trainings.** Recommend that HR incorporate elements of the *Supervising Box Series* into existing trainings for supervisors or trainings on diversity. If no such training exists, suggest that some of these resources be used to develop a new training to address these issues, or suggest that HR might want to consult with NCWIT to develop this type of training.

2. **Pass along resources to HR for evaluating policies or evaluation instruments.** Recommend that HR use some of the resources in the *Supervising-in-a-Box Series*, particularly the *Employee Recruitment/Selection* and the *Performance Review/Talent Management* boxes, to examine existing recruiting, talent management, and performance evaluation tools for unconscious biases.
3 Make executives and others aware of the business case for increasing women and other underrepresented groups’ participation. See pages 5-18 in this Box for talking points on the business case and other issues related to gender and technology. Also see www.ncwit.org/thefacts for a compelling visual resource for making the business case. Hard copies of this document are available from info@ncwit.org.

4 Recommend measuring the “current state of affairs” and establishing a benchmark. Talk with senior leaders, HR, or the appropriate personnel about conducting a company-wide survey to assess the current experiences of underrepresented groups (see page 32).

5 Recommend resources for developing a systemic plan for change. Recommend that senior leaders, HR, or those involved in leading diversity efforts develop a strategic plan for systemic change. The NCWIT workbook, Strategic Planning for Increasing Women’s Participation in the Computing Industry (available at www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook), is one resource that can help leaders or change agents develop a comprehensive plan.
People react to change in different ways. Be prepared that the colleagues you discuss change with may perceive it differently than you do. Some of us run head first into change and others resist at all costs. Keep this in mind as you propose new initiatives, processes, or even when engaging in conversations about change.

Following are four common reactions to change. Keep in mind that these are not “static” categories. One could be an “embracer” through one change and a “resistor” to another.

EMBRACING

“Embracers” typically react positively to new changes. Folks in this camp would make good supporters and can help you as a change agent. Make sure to include any embracers in your equity efforts.

ACCEPTING

“Acceptors” will usually get onboard with change as long as their supervisors, teams, or friends support the change. As they do not fully embrace the change, they need consistent reminders and attention to change efforts. Once efforts to create change stop, acceptors might stop changing their behavior.

IGNORING

“Ignorers” can be challenging to work with during change. They appear to be supportive and agree to change but completely ignore change efforts when they are on their own. Ignorers can be hard to identify because they appear to be compliant.

RESISTING

Resistors are vocally opposed to change. They will try to impede change efforts at every juncture of the change. When pushed to change, these employees can change, but may just as likely never change.

Read through the next few pages for tips on how to work with people with positive or negative reactions to change.
Supervisory colleagues are very important, especially when trying to motivate organizational change. Be sure to cultivate this valuable resource. Following are some tips for leveraging supportive colleagues:

- Get supporters on board immediately. Invite them to offer opinions and ideas; enlist their help in raising awareness about the need for change.
- Respect the time your supporters have available. Ask upfront how much time they are willing to give and do not violate the terms.
- Work with supporters to outline their circle of influence, identifying the areas where they might be the most effective in raising awareness and motivating change (see page 33 for the Identifying and Assessing Your Circle of Influence worksheet).
- Try to find supporters in a wide variety of departments, positions, and power locations.
- Let your supporters help you create “buzz” about the need for diverse participation in technology and how to realize this diversity.
- Be sure that these supporters are on all teams responsible for planning change. Give them (and all members) a specific role. How do they want to help? In what areas are they especially talented?
How to Work with a Seemingly Unsupportive Colleague

Seemingly unsupportive colleagues may seem like a serious hurdle when trying to enact change, but they can also be surprisingly helpful. For instance, difficult coworkers may verbalize concerns that other employees silently feel. This gives you the opportunity to diffuse inaccurate information and to respond to concerns that others also might have but might be afraid to say.

Following are some tips for working with a seemingly unsupportive colleague:

- Most importantly, remember that there are many reasons (e.g., lack of time, lack of power to act, misunderstanding the issue or nature of proposed changes) a colleague may seem unsupportive, even though they may, in fact, agree with many of the proposed goals.

- Ask for his/her concerns up front. Do so in a way that communicates that you are sincerely interested in understanding his/her perspective.

- Acknowledge his/her concerns. Try to see his/her point of view and be supportive. Is the individual threatened that he/she might lose a job or a promotion by supporting women?

- Ask for his/her support. Recruit the individual to be a part of the initial change group. Tell him/her that you value all perspectives and want him/her on board up front.

- Emphasize the positive benefits of diversity for the company, for innovation, and for everyone (not just the benefits for underrepresented groups). Collect and share positive change stories or statistics.

- Do NOT put her/him on the spot in front of a group. Try to talk to an unsupportive colleague in private before any formal meetings or announcements.

- Give as much notice about any changes as possible.

- If one of the objections is that planned change efforts seem too overwhelming, pick one area to focus on at a time. (For example, instead of promoting “diversity,” work first on reducing unconscious biases and improving equity in performance reviews).

- Give direct feedback on how his/her attitude or behavior is perceived and some effects of the perception.

- Present consequences for non-compliance, if necessary.
RESOURCES

The resources in this section are for technical managers who are interested in making changes within their own team and/or educating others about these issues. If you are not in such a position, consider passing this information along to those who are.

» Resources: Roadmap of Available NCWIT Resources for Change ................................................................. 28
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RESOURCES

Roadmap of Available NCWIT Resources for Change

It Takes an Ecosystem. The NCWIT Industry Reform Model to the right illustrates the key areas of an organization that need to be addressed for sustained change in creating inclusive environments.

NCWIT provides practical resources to help managers and companies implement promising practices in each of these areas. Below is a brief description of the types of resources NCWIT offers followed by a key that categorizes these resources according to each area in the reform model.

In general, NCWIT resources fall into these categories:

» **NCWIT PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX** offer turnkey solutions to pressing issues facing the IT community. Programs-in-a-Box provide all the components necessary for quick and strategic action, right out-of-the-box.

» **NCWIT PROMISING PRACTICES** use social science research as a foundation for advice, case studies, and activities that are proven to attract, retain, and advance girls and women in IT.

» **NCWIT TALKING POINTS** are a series of easy-to-use conversation cards designed to promote the involvement of women in IT by helping people talk about the issues.

» **NCWIT WORKBOOKS**. These resources serve as guides for developing a coherent, comprehensive strategic plan for increasing diverse participation in computing.

» **REPORTS** present compelling research and data in easily digestible packaging.

» **OUTREACH RESOURCES** are well-researched, well-designed, and well-suited to appeal to all kinds of audiences.

Use the key on the following pages to identify resources in the areas where your organization most needs to make change.
RESOURCES FOR MULTIPLES AREAS OF THE ECOSYSTEM

➤ WORKBOOK: *Strategic Planning For Increasing Women’s Participation in Computing* (available at [www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook](http://www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook)). Use this workbook to coordinate and organize change efforts into a comprehensive, strategic plan for increasing diverse participation in technology.

➤ PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: *Supervising-in-a-Box Series* (available at [www.ncwit.org/supervising](http://www.ncwit.org/supervising)). Although intended especially for supervisors, this Box Series contains of wealth of information for helping others throughout the organization reduce unconscious biases and institutional barriers in five areas: Recruitment/Selection, Employee Development, Team/Project Management, Performance Evaluation/Talent Management, and Supervisors As Change Agents.

➤ REPORT: *Women in IT: The Facts* and the “Business Case” for Women in Technology (available at [www.ncwit.org/thefacts](http://www.ncwit.org/thefacts)). Use these informational pieces to raise awareness about the current state of affairs and how to address key barriers to women’s participation.

➤ OUTREACH RESOURCES: *By The Numbers* (available at [www.ncwit.org/bythenumbers](http://www.ncwit.org/bythenumbers)) and the *Scorecard* (available at [www.ncwit.org/scorecard](http://www.ncwit.org/scorecard)). Use these informational pieces to make others aware of important “snapshot” statistics related to women and technology.

➤ PROMISING PRACTICE: *How Can Companies Achieve Organizational Diversity? Establishing Institutional Accountability (Case Study 1)*
[www.ncwit.org/institutionalaccountability](http://www.ncwit.org/institutionalaccountability)

➤ REPORT: “Business Case” for Women in Technology
(available as a PDF along with the full report, *Women in IT: The Facts*)
[www.ncwit.org/thefacts](http://www.ncwit.org/thefacts)

➤ PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: *Supervising-in-a-Box Series* (Five Boxes: Recruitment/Selection; Employee Development; Team/Project Management; Performance Evaluation/Talent Management; Supervisors as Change Agents)
[www.ncwit.org/supervising](http://www.ncwit.org/supervising)
PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Recruitment/Selection
www.ncwit.org/supervising

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Organizations Recruit Diverse Talent in Ways that Promote Innovation and Productivity? Interview Strategies that Identify Functionally Diverse Perspectives (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/interviewstrategies

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Reducing Unconscious Bias Increase Women’s Success in IT? Avoiding Gender Bias in Recruitment/Selection Processes
www.ncwit.org/biasselection

PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: Mentoring-in-a-Box: Technical Women at Work
www.ncwit.org/imentor

PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Employee Development
www.ncwit.org/supervising

www.ncwit.org/mentornet

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Do You Provide Intentional Role Modeling? Regional Celebrations of Women in Computing — R-CWIC (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/rcwic

www.ncwit.org/supervising

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Reducing Unconscious Bias Increase Women’s Success in IT? Avoiding Unintended Bias in Letters of Recommendation (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/biasletters
PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: Supervising-in-a-Box Series
www.ncwit.org/supervising

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Reducing Unconscious Bias Increase Women’s Success in IT? Avoiding Unintended Bias in Letters of Recommendation (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/biasletters

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Reducing Unconscious Bias Increase Women’s Success in IT? Avoiding Gender Bias in Recruitment/Selection Processes (Case Study 2)
www.ncwit.org/biasselection

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Do Stereotype Threats Affect Retention? Better Approaches to Well-Intentioned, but Harmful Messages (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/stereotypethreat

PROGRAMS-IN-A-BOX: Supervising-in-a-Box: Team/Project Management
www.ncwit.org/supervising

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Companies Attract and Retain Mid-Career Female Employees? Constructing On-Ramps (Case Study 1)
www.ncwit.org/onramps

PROMISING PRACTICE: How Can Companies Attract and Retain Mid-Career Female Employees? Military Spouse Reentry Programs (Case Study 2)
www.ncwit.org/militaryspouse

REPORT: Women in IT: The Facts
www.ncwit.org/thefacts
Encourage senior leadership to implement company efforts to evaluate the climate for women and other underrepresented groups. Following are several existing tools available for use:

**CLIMBING THE TECHNICAL LADDER SURVEY**

This groundbreaking study established a national baseline for technical women’s experiences within their companies on a number of measures, including satisfaction with mentoring, supervisory relationships, flexible work policies, and talent management/advancement practices. The survey questions used in the original study are available by contacting Dr. Caroline Simard (carolines@anitaborg.org) at the Anita Borg Institute. Using these same survey questions would help companies compare themselves internally to a national baseline.

**LEVEL PLAYING FIELD INSTITUTE**

The Level Playing Field Institute has conducted extensive survey research into unconscious bias and how it affects corporate culture and turnover. They have sample surveys available for organizations that would like to conduct similar surveys and can assist with this process (info@lpfi.org). Using these survey templates also would help companies compare themselves internally to a national baseline.
**RESOURCES**

**Identifying and Assessing Your Circle of Influence**

*Use the chart below to help plan your efforts at raising awareness and motivating change. In the first column, identify the contacts/colleagues with whom you have influence. Then identify the people, programs, policies, or other areas that they influence or are in a position to help change and the topics or actions that would be of most relevance for them.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals, departments, or groups with whom you have influence. Consider people in all areas and levels of the organization.</th>
<th>Areas over which these contacts have influence</th>
<th>Relevant topics to discuss/actions to encourage</th>
<th>NCWIT (or other) resources you can use to raise awareness or facilitate action</th>
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**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

1. **Individual supervisors can make a difference. Following are some tips for ways you can help:**
   - Identify your areas of influence and work toward making change in those areas.
   - Distribute information from the tip or fact sheets in the *Supervising Box Series*.
   - Conduct informational sessions.
   - Strategically display resources.
   - Pass resources to HR for trainings and evaluation.
   - Share the business case with executives.
   - Recommend measuring the “current state of affairs.”
   - Recommend resources for developing a systematic plan for change.

2. **Present the business case for increasing diverse participation by sharing the following information:**
   - Computing occupations are among the fastest growing occupations.
   - However, if current trends continue, the technology industry will only be able to fill half of the 1.4 million available jobs by 2018.
   - Diversity improves innovation, company performance, and customer satisfaction.
   - Attracting and retaining more women in technology will create a stronger workforce; lower attrition costs; increase innovation, efficiency and problem-solving; improve financial gains; and produce better products.

3. **Raise awareness about the primary barriers for women in IT, which include:**
   - lack of mentors and professional development
   - supervisory relationships
   - bias in performance reviews and promotion
   - lack of support for competing life responsibilities
   - unconscious biases
Refer colleagues to important resources for addressing these barriers, such as the *Women in IT: The Facts* report available at [www.ncwit.org/thefacts](http://www.ncwit.org/thefacts) or the industry workbook, *Strategic Planning for Increasing Women’s Participation in Computing* at [www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook](http://www.ncwit.org/industryworkbook).

When trying to motivate change, identify supportive colleagues and get them on board early. Seemingly unsupportive colleagues are also important; ask for information about their concerns before rushing to any conclusions. Communicate that you value their perspective and want to work together to find ways to address their concerns.
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS:
BACKGROUND AND TRAINING GUIDE

THE PROBLEM: HIDDEN BIASES AND BARRIERS
COST CORPORATE AMERICA $64 BILLION PER YEAR
— AND THAT IS A CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE.

COST #1: EMPLOYEE TURNOVER AND LOSS OF TALENT. The
above estimate accounts only for the annual cost of employee
turnover due solely to unfairness, which disproportionately
affects people of color, women, and gay, lesbian, bisexual,
and transgendered (GLBT) employees.8 When considering
other intangible factors, such as the cost to company
reputation and ability to recruit new talent, the price tag soars
even higher.

COST #2: LOSING THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSE INNOVATION.
The above estimate does not include the cost companies
incur when they fail to realize the benefits of diverse work
teams. Numerous recent studies document how diverse work
to work teams improve innovation, problem-solving, and productivity.
Consider just a few examples:

» An NCWIT study revealed that mixed-gender teams
produce IT patents that are more highly cited.11

» Similarly, the London Business School found that
work teams with equal numbers of men and women
were more likely than all other types of teams to
experiment, be creative, share knowledge, and fulfill
tasks.12

» Additional studies indicate that, under the right
conditions, teams comprising diverse members
consistently outperform teams comprising “highest-
ability” members.13

Unconscious bias and institutional barriers not only result in
the loss of diverse talent, but they also prevent supervisors
from even recruiting or hiring diverse talent in the first
place. Likewise, they can prevent employees who do stay
from contributing their best ideas — ideas that would
make valuable contributions to work teams and company
productivity.

8 See the Corporate Leavers Survey published by the Level Playing Field
9 Reibstein as cited in Kapor Klein, Giving Notice.
10 Kapor Klein, Giving Notice.
11 Ashcraft, C. & Breitzman, T. Who Invents IT?
13 Page, S., The Difference.
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS: WHAT IS IT AND WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES?

Unconscious bias results when our pre-existing gender schemas (stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes, representations, narratives) about particular groups of people subtly influence behaviors and decisions, negatively affecting employees from underrepresented groups.

“But we’ve moved beyond that! We’re all pretty open and fair-minded around here.” A great deal of research shows that even individuals who consider themselves committed to equality and believe that they have overcome these biases still engage in subtle forms of unconscious bias and discrimination. Consider the following examples:

- In one study, candidates with resumes that had white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks than the exact same resumes with black-sounding names.15
- In another study, college administrators were far more likely to say they would hire candidates with resumes that had male names rather than female names even though the resumes were identical. This effect is exacerbated when women make up a smaller proportion of the candidate pool, as is often the case in technical companies or departments.16
- In the Implicit Association Test, a test designed to measure unconscious bias, almost all test takers initially describe themselves as unbiased, yet 88% of white test takers show some bias against African Americans, and a majority of test takers show bias against photos of people who are overweight, gay, elderly, or Arab/Muslim.17
- When shown pictures of people of the same height, study participants overestimated the height of males and underestimated the height of females even though the photo included a reference point, such as a doorway.18

Unconscious biases such as these have a profound effect on the workplace, on supervisory relationships, and on hiring, performance, and advancement procedures.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS: WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW ARE THEY RELATED TO UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

Institutional barriers include any aspect of a particular culture that systematically disadvantages certain groups of people. While similar to and often caused by unconscious bias, these barriers are more formal and institutionalized. When an initial population is fairly similar (i.e., in male-dominated professions), systems naturally emerge to meet the needs of this population. If these systems do not change with the times, they can inhibit the success of new members with different needs. It is important to remember that these barriers naturally arise in any majority-minority situation and are not necessarily the result of any ill intentions. Addressing the barriers is the goal, not finding fault or assigning blame.

14 Dovidio, On Contemporary Prejudice.
15 Bretrand & Mullainathan, Are Emily and Greg More Employable.
16 Steinpreis, et. al., The Impact of Gender on the Review.
17 Banaji & Hardin, Automatic Stereotyping.
18 Biernat, et. al., Stereotypes and Standards of Judgement.
Some examples of institutional barriers include the following:

- Systems that give more important tasks to people based on criteria that tend to advantage one group (e.g. is in the office later at night, doesn’t have children)
- Rigid schedules that make it difficult to attend to family responsibilities
- Holding informal meetings in places underrepresented members are unlikely to be (e.g. golf course, bar after work)
- “Promotion from within” policies (if few or no members from underrepresented groups are in the “pipeline” for promotion from within)
- Performance evaluation criteria that (perhaps inadvertently) reward certain styles of communication rather than actual performance
- Hiring systems or policies that weigh universities differently without considering how this perpetuates bias against low-income or first-generation college candidates. While some sort of weight system is necessary, companies also should build in weights that give credit to students for overcoming adverse conditions. This is arguably as important a quality in job performance as attending a prestigious school.

While unconscious bias certainly contributes to the development of institutional barriers, addressing individual unconscious bias alone will not remove institutional barriers. Companies also must identify and actively dismantle seemingly natural systems (rather than only individual biases) that disadvantage particular groups.

**OTHER MISUNDERSTOOD MAJORITY-MINORITY PHENOMENA: SUBTLE DYNAMICS RELATED TO UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS**

Unconscious bias and institutional barriers result in a number of other phenomena and subtle dynamics commonly found in majority-minority environments (see figure below). These dynamics are often mistakenly seen as the fault of the minority members themselves. In reality, however, they are naturally occurring phenomena that arise in most majority-minority contexts because of unconscious biases and institutional barriers. Recognizing and addressing these dynamics is important for managing a productive team and fostering diverse innovation.
 MICROINEQUITIES:

“My manager always lists me last toward the bottom in email to the team, unless there is a problem. THEN I’m first in the list. What’s up with that?”

Microinequities — closely related to and often caused by unconscious bias — are subtle cumulative messages that devalue, discourage, and impair performance in the workplace. These messages include looks, gestures, or tone of voice, and often accumulate in ways that lead employees to underperform, withdraw from co-workers, and ultimately leave the workplace. Other examples include the following:

- Failing to recognize an idea when expressed by one employee but acknowledging it when paraphrased by another employee
- Looking at the clock, answering the cell phone, or other subtle behaviors that indicate a manager or supervisor is not interested in the conversation with an employee
- Subtle norms that make it acceptable for heterosexuals to talk about what they did on the weekend with husbands, wives, family but not as acceptable or comfortable for GLBT employees to do so

STEREOTYPE THREAT:

“Great job! You’re living proof that women really do have a technical-mind!”

Even when said in jest, these kinds of comments (or more subtle comments) can invoke stereotype threat — the fear or anxiety that our actions will confirm negative stereotypes about our “group” or about ourselves as members of a group. These fears and anxieties reduce feelings of competence and trust, and can negatively affect performance, confidence, and risk-taking behavior. Consider the following examples:

- White male engineering students get lower-than-usual test grades when told in advance that Asians typically score higher than any other group on math tests.
- African Americans underachieve on academic tests when told racial stereotypes about intelligence.
- Women underperform on math tests when gender is called to their attention.

It is important for supervisors to recognize these phenomena; otherwise they might incorrectly assume that this lack of confidence or certain instances of underperformance are the result of personal characteristics of the employees themselves. This will leave the conditions that create stereotype threat unaddressed, ensuring that these employees are not able to live up to their full potential and most likely will leave the company.

TOKENISM:

“We’re so excited to have you on board, and we’ve really needed someone like you to help us understand the Asian market.”

Tokenism often occurs when only a few employees belong to a particular identity group (e.g., in terms of gender, race, age).

19 Young, The Power of Small.
20 Aronson, et. al., When White Men Can’t Do Math.
21 Steele & Aronson, Stereotype Threat.
22 Correll, Gender and the Career Choice Process.
The presence of these few “token” employees is sometimes used to satisfy technical diversity requirements but can mask the fact that a true environment of inclusiveness does not exist. Tokenism also results in a number of additional problems.

- These members from diverse groups are often expected by others to “speak for” or “represent” the group as a whole.
- Diverse members are expected to be able to “relate to” customers or clients who are also members of the same or similar identity group/s.
- Members from diverse groups get tapped for a larger share of diversity work. This frequently prevents them from putting as much time into other aspects of their jobs, often negatively affecting job performance, evaluations, and advancement.

These expectations ignore the reality that a wide range of variation exists within any identity group and that it is unreasonable to expect one person to represent this within-group variation (for example, rarely do we expect a white person to speak for all whites or a man to speak for all men).

**GENDER — OR COLOR — “BLINDNESS”:**

“I don’t see color or gender; you do your work well on my team, you’ll succeed!”

Individuals frequently make well-intentioned assertions such as these in an effort to combat prejudice and treat employees equitably. A gender- or color-blind stance might be appropriate if the larger society also were gender- and color-blind. Since this is not yet the case, holding such a stance ignores important current realities. Women and people of color often have experiences that shape their lives differently, (e.g., women more often than men have to think about or are asked to explain how they balance work and family responsibilities). These individuals also face different prejudice and inequities. “Treating everyone the same” ignores these realities and the fact that existing workplace conditions do not meet these employees’ needs. It also ignores the fact that current workplace conditions are not natural; they have subtly evolved to meet the needs of the original population. This is especially the case in organizations where the original population was a relatively similar group of people (e.g., men, women, whites). For example, when most employees have a stay-at-home-spouse at home taking care of the children, flex time does not become a norm because these employees do not need it. If most of the original employee population had been single parents or had dual-working relationships, different systems would most likely have evolved.

**WITHIN-GROUP “COMPETITIVENESS”:**

“Women are often their own worst enemy; if you’d stop competing or fighting with each other, you’d be so much better off.”

“Frankly, I prefer working with men: women can be so catty and not straightforward; men will more often just tell you how it is.”

These comments mistakenly assume that this competitiveness results from characteristics of the minority members themselves; however, this dynamic occurs in almost any majority-minority situation where underrepresented groups feel pressure to scramble for limited resources and
rewards. While all employees may feel this pressure to some degree, the pervasiveness of stereotype threat, tokenism, and other such phenomena compound this pressure for members from underrepresented groups. These phenomena also make it far more likely that any mistakes or failures will be attributed, at least in part, to the employee’s membership in an underrepresented group (e.g., reflected in comments such as “See, generally speaking, women are just more emotional about these sorts of things”).

These dynamics also foster an increasingly competitive environment where, in order to succeed, members of underrepresented groups feel they must compete with each other or distance themselves from others in the same identity group in order to escape the assumptions made about that group (e.g., not only “act like a man” but highlight how you “act more like a man” than other women do).

THE GLASS CLIFF:

“Well, we’ve been getting pressure to diversify management, so we better give her a shot even if she’s not quite ready.”

This phenomenon occurs when members from underrepresented groups are promoted too early or put in charge of tasks they do not yet have the expertise or the authority to carry out. Similar to tokenism, this often happens as supervisors, managers, or company leaders try to meet diversity requirements. Meeting these requirements in this way, however, unwittingly sets these employees up to fail and is detrimental to the long term interest of the company, to the employee’s own interest, and to future efforts for hiring and retaining diverse employees. Supervisors need to be keenly aware of whether or not they are hiring and promoting members of underrepresented groups simply to fill a “diversity requirement” and, in the process, may be setting these employees up to fail or fall off the “glass cliff.”

PRIVILEGE:

“I’m where I am because of hard work! I didn’t take advantage of any special treatment or handouts.”

We often talk about how unconscious biases, sexism and racism disadvantage underrepresented groups. Less often do we talk about how these biases and systems actually privilege or actively advantage majority group members. As Peggy McIntosh explains, in her case about white privilege, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious.”

It is important to remember that recognizing and discussing “privilege” is in no way meant to diminish the work or accomplishments of majority members. It is certainly true that many or most majority members have worked hard to get to where they are. Statements like the opening quote above, however, mask the fact that these members also frequently benefit from a workplace that was, for the most part, designed by and for employees relatively similar to them. This makes “special treatment” unnecessary because these “treatments” are already built into the policies and cultural norms of a workplace.

The following list is adapted from McIntosh’s list to illustrate some of the invisible privileges majority group members

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23 McIntosh, White Privilege.
experience in the workplace. These daily, taken-for-granted experiences provide subtle, intangible advantages that produce a significant cumulative effect. As an interesting exercise or discussion tool, employees and managers might consider the examples below, identifying which apply to their lives or daily experiences.

» At work, I can be in the company of people of my gender and/or race most of the time. I also regularly see people of my gender and/or race represented in top leadership positions.

» I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally. I can also be pretty sure these people will be similar to me in gender and/or race.

» I can perform my job well without being called a “credit to my gender and/or race.” If I perform my job poorly, people also are unlikely to attribute this to my gender and/or race.

» I can attend meetings or work socials relatively sure that no one will ask me to get them a cup of coffee or a cocktail unless this is actually part of my job description.

» I am never asked to speak for all the people of my gender or racial group.

» I can advocate for women or other underrepresented groups without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking. In other words, I am less likely to be seen or talked about behind my back as promoting “my own agenda.”

When looking back at the history of our industry and technological invention, I am consistently shown that people of my gender and/or race made it what it is today.
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS: SAMPLE SCENARIOS AND VIDEO VIGNETTES

Use the scenarios and discussion questions on the next page to explore unconscious bias and institutional barriers with your employees. Two video versions of these scenarios also are available for download at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR OWN VIDEO VIGNETTES

The sample scenarios in this box are based on real-life examples drawn from the Level Playing Field’s Corporate Leavers Study. You also can turn real-life scenarios from your own company into customized video vignettes. To do so, contact the Level Playing Field Institute, jacqueline@lpfi.org.

EDUCATE AND TRAIN EMPLOYEES USING SUPERVISING-IN-A-BOX: TEAM/PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Detailed information on how to use this section to help educate and train employees is included in the “Add-water” Resources section of this box. This section also includes additional information on “bystander training” — how to help employees or colleagues who witness biased behaviors (but may not be directly involved) to take appropriate and helpful action.
The following scenarios are all real-life examples of how unconscious bias plays out in the workplace. Read through the scenarios and use the questions below to explore practical ways for addressing these biases and barriers.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What kinds of biases are operating in this scenario?
2. What problems, if any, do you see with the way this scenario was handled?
3. What could have the various players in each scenario done differently?
4. What kinds of company policies, practices, or cultural norms might prevent this sort of scenario from happening in the first place?

**SCENARIO 1**

At a recent strategy retreat for senior managers, the conversation over dinner turned to global economic trends. I often get drowned out during these conversations as I’m the only senior African American woman business unit manager across any of our offices, yet I’m also the only one who was a successful entrepreneur before coming here. As the talk turned from economics to the U.S. presidential election, a very senior manager reached across the table and snatched the dessert that had just been placed in front of me. He commented loudly that since Obama might win, the team would need me to stay healthy and go get all that new business. I was shocked and insulted on so many levels. Was my health not important before? My experience and intelligence should be all that counts. If they think I might have an advantage in a new administration, did they ever think about the advantage they’ve always had?

**SCENARIO 2**

When I had errors on my work, even if it was really minor, the partner would say, “There is an English problem here” instead of just calling it a typo. Even stupid things like when I capitalized a term she didn’t think should be capitalized she would call it an “English problem.” It was really offensive. Everyone made typos but when I made them it was different. I felt singled out. But when we had an Asian client, they were more than happy to have me speak Chinese. My bilingual background only hurt me, it didn’t help me when it benefited the firm. – *Asian, female lawyer*

**SCENARIO 3**

I had been working for my tech company for a number of years, as one of the relatively few moms working there. Because of the crazy hours and the convenience, I was paying to send my two children to the company’s onsite day care facility. I was absolutely shocked when I found out recently that company leadership decided to raise charges for their day care by a whopping 75% — which is even above the market rate! That means I’d be paying about $50,000 per year for my two kids. Even though I and other parents in the company voiced our concerns about many not being able to afford such costly daycare, they went forth with their decision
to raise prices through the roof. Part of their argument was
that they were upgrading to the highest quality daycare
services. Well, to be honest, a lot of parents were quite
satisfied with the previous daycare. So I think to myself,
what is the point of upgrading to “state of the art” daycare
if only the wealthiest can afford it? Personally, I don’t need
“Gucci daycare.” That was the last straw in the elitism of
the company for me. Why not provide affordable, quality services
for all employees? I guess finding an equitable solution just
wasn’t a priority.

Scenario 4

José recalled his mentor’s advice about networking, so
when he was at the company’s holiday party and saw two
colleagues talking to the regional Vice President, he walked
right over to say hello. The VP responded, “Thanks, I’ll
take another white wine please.” It took José a few stunned
seconds to realize the VP had mistaken him for a waiter, and a
few more stunned seconds to realize his two colleagues were
not setting the record straight and introducing him.24

Scenario 5

As the most senior woman on an engineering team of a
fast-paced start-up, I loved my job. The thrill of creating
something, the ups and downs of getting funding, the tough
competition in the space—there’s nothing like it. So when I
became a mom, I vowed not to let my team down. I’d arrive
at 8am, having dropped my kids at daycare, and got right to
work. Around 10, 10:30, the single guys would start to show
up. They’d get their coffee and breakfast and sit at their
desks, perusing their favorite blogs and news sites. After a
stint of work, it would be lunch time; I’d eat at my desk and
they would either go out or go to the gym. By mid-afternoon,
as I was racing to get things done before picking up my kids,
many of my colleagues would gather for a round of frisbee or
foosball or ping pong. At the stroke of 5:00, I’d be off to pick
up my kids and have dinner with my family. Usually by
9 p.m. I’d log back on and see how my teammates felt about
my day’s contributions.

Not long ago, I was up for a promotion; given my peer reviews
and my experience, it was a slam-dunk. But my manager
doubted my commitment. He said, “When I make the rounds
at 9 p.m., I see many of your teammates still working while
eating pizza at their desks. I know you’re often online, but
that’s not the same.” I told him, “Of course they’re still at
their desks at 9 p.m., they’ve only put in 6 hours of work so
far that day.”

That’s when I knew I was out of there. If my manager can’t tell
the difference between face time and productivity, I’ll never
get what I deserve.

Scenario 6

Within six months of my new job, I found out I was pregnant.
I told my boss, “I’m so happy. I’m pregnant.” My boss quit
talking to me for a week. It was very strange because we
were so close. So I pulled him aside and asked, “What’s
wrong here? Why aren’t you talking to me?” He said, “Well,
you know, you were my walk-on-water. I have even given you
special training. Now you are going to leave.” I said, “I’m
not leaving. I’m giving you eight months notice. We can plan
for this. I will come back.” He said, “No you won’t.” I asked,
“Hold on. What’s your paradigm?” He told me his first wife

24 Scully & Rowe, Bystander Training. All other scenarios in this section come
from the Level Playing Field’s Corporate Leavers Study.
got pregnant and quit work. His second wife just won’t have kids because all she does is work. I said, “How about a new paradigm: I work and I have my baby and then I come back to work. I’ve given you eight months notice. We can plan my projects. If I was Joe Shmoe and broke my leg skiing, I’d call in and say that I couldn’t come in for three weeks. But this is something we can plan for.” He still didn’t get it. So I said, “Look, somebody had to quit work long enough to have you and every other man who works in this company.” He just looked at me and finally he got it.