



It is generally recognized that more diverse decision-making panels make better decisions: including more perspectives reduces bias, increases transparency, and exposes more individuals to how decisions are made. But old habits die hard, and increasing the diversity of committees demands behavioral change. Here are some strategies that can help.

### Diversify across characteristics to support a range of perspectives

While increasing racial and gender representation is critically important, people from other less-represented groups—like first-generation or early career academics, or those with cross-disciplinary experience—can also invite new and valuable perspectives.

### Connect committee composition to outcomes through representation of those who will be affected

Deliberately inviting perspectives from those who will be on the receiving end of policy or directly impacted by decisions ensures that issues which might otherwise go unseen have the chance to be addressed.

### Transparency invites trust

When decisions about who's included (and who's not) are decided upon behind closed doors, even well-meaning intent can seem mysterious. In contrast, transparent and consistently applied criteria create a baseline and build a foundation of credibility.

### Broadening who is exposed to processes can promote equity of opportunity

The ability to see behind the curtain may be especially useful for first-generation researchers or those new to the field. But recognize when committees become a form of added burden in the form of "invisible labor"<sup>4</sup> for those already expected to pull more than their fair share.

### Taking a portfolio view

Keeping the bigger picture in mind can protect against the common tendency to make individual decisions, each reasonable in isolation—the so-called "isolated choice effect"<sup>2</sup>—that collectively reinforces familiar norms or standards of decision-making.

### Overcome "two-kenism"<sup>1</sup> tendencies

Research indicates that committees stop seeking diversity after selecting two underrepresented individuals, feeling like they've "checked the box." Making diverse representation less like a quota to be filled can also reduce the perception that those individuals must represent entire segments rather than their personal expertise.

### Fostering true diversity of opinion

Non-traditional participants may fear judgment or feel a need to check themselves when making suggestions that run counter to established or commonly held views. More inclusive processes deliberately create space to consider all viewpoints, with shared goals in mind.

### Relying on self-identification or selection by leadership can reinforce existing biases

Research shows that making selection opt-out rather than opt-in can help boost inclusion of those who less comfortable with self-promotion<sup>3</sup>, or those who may not seem like "obvious" choices.

### Question the norms about who is qualified to participate or contribute

When traditional or overly narrow forms of inclusion and exclusion—like seniority or rank—are used as criteria too early, they may leave out individuals who can provide important alternative points of view.

### Expanding a sense of what's possible

Traditions and historical norms are sticky in part due to status quo bias, but can also persist due to a perceived lack of other alternatives. Gaining exposure to new options by seeing what others have done can help overcome "the way things are done around here."

## Debiasing deliberative processes can also reduce "business as usual" decision-making tendencies

### Reducing leadership bias

- **Conduct and document "pre-briefs."** Spending time upfront to collectively craft the "rules of the road" for committee work can create alignment and serve as a shared touchpoint that everyone—no matter what their role or seniority—can point to if things go awry.
- **Make all votes count.** Seeing how others are voting can sway where we put our own chips. Techniques like anonymous voting can help reduce tendencies to conform to others' views or confirm safe choices rather than express true preferences.

### Reducing individual bias

- **Question what we think we know.** Asking committee members to explicitly step through their thought processes and assumptions can surface and counteract "confirmation bias," or the tendency to prioritize data that reinforces existing preconceptions<sup>5</sup>.
- **Even the playing field.** Consider strategies to reduce advantages of circumstance; providing interview questions in advance can equalize candidates, and using relative measures—such as progress from a starting point rather than judging absolute accomplishments—can gauge applicant quality more fairly.

### Increasing systems thinking

- **Identify bias at a system level.** Efforts to reduce personal bias can put the burden on individuals to change, and can ignore how systems themselves are often designed to reinforce "hidden in plain sight" biases.
- **Think downstream.** Improving diversity through hiring will fall flat without equal investment in mentorship and retention.
- **Use structure to provide consistency.** Structured approaches—like interview protocols and pre-determined criteria—can increase confidence in comparison without resorting to solely quantitative measures.

<sup>1</sup> Chang, EH, D Chugh, M Akinola, and KL Milkman (2019) Diversity Thresholds: How Social Norms, Visibility, And Scrutiny Relate To Group Composition. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 144–171. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2017.0440>

<sup>2</sup> Chang, EH, EL Kirgios, A Rai, and KL Milkman (2020) The Isolated Choice Effect and Its Implications for Gender Diversity in Organizations. *Management Science*: 1-10

<sup>3</sup> He, JC, SK Kangb and N Lacetera (2021) Opt-out choice framing attenuates gender differences in the decision to compete in the laboratory and in the field. *PNAS* 118 (42) e2108337118 | <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2108337118>

<sup>4</sup> Crain, M, M Cherry, and W Poster (2016) *Invisible Labor: Hidden Work in the Contemporary World*. University of California Press

<sup>5</sup> Hernandez, I and JL Preston. Disfluency disrupts the confirmation bias. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.08.010>