

What is Class Bias?

Class bias is a preference for or against someone based on stereotypes and misconceptions about their class.



What does class bias at work look like?

Class bias can take many forms at work. Understanding how it can show up makes it easier to identify, and to reflect on whether your own assumptions or decisions may have been shaped by class bias.



Appearance bias – e.g. making a judgement about someone's social class and their suitability for leadership based on their appearance (such as their clothing,¹ facial features² and tattoos³).

"People assume my appearance or personal style means I'm not well-educated."



Education bias – e.g. showing a preference for applicants and employees who attended elite private schools or universities when making recruiting or promotion decisions.

"I was told that I attended a 'Country Hick' university."



Accent or linguistic bias – e.g. making assessments about someone's social class and their suitability for client facing work based on the type of language they use (e.g. accent or choice of words).

"I was once told by a manager ... that I needed elocution lessons as I sounded 'common' and he didn't want me speaking to his exec clients."



Location or residence bias – e.g. making fun of colleagues because they live in areas considered less wealthy (e.g. regional areas or outer suburbs).

"[I] received denigrating/prejudiced comments for living in Western Sydney."



Hobbies and interests bias – e.g. excluding someone from workplace socialising based on assumptions they do not like or understand activities seen as "classy" or "highbrow" (such as attending the opera, golfing or sailing).⁴

"Assuming everyone knows how to sail and golf for various work client and social events."



Food and drink bias – e.g. making fun of colleagues for bringing packed lunches to work and the type of food they eat.⁵

"People being laughed at for bringing lunch to work."

How can organisations address class bias?

DCA surveyed 1,403 workers in Australia and conducted an extensive literature review about how class bias shows up in Australian workplaces and what organisations can do to address this.



Organisational locks:

What are the organisational locks (barriers) locking out class marginalised people in workplaces?



Organisational keys:

What are the organisational keys to creating class diversity and inclusion?

1	Lock 1: Low class literacy	<i>“ Class diversity and inclusion has not been included in the overarching DE&I discussion in my organisation. Executives and senior management come from upper class backgrounds (private school education, reside in the most expensive suburbs, etc) so they do not see class as a barrier.</i>	Key 1: Build class literacy
	Lock 2: Unknown current state	<i>“ We deem the request for this information intrusive, unethical, and possibly illegal in Australia.</i>	Key 2: Count class
3	Lock 3: Class-biased recruitment	<i>“ I've sat in rooms while other recruitment panel members have mocked the poor clothes of some of the candidates and their 'bogan' presentation.</i>	Key 3: Recruit for class diversity
4	Lock 4: Class-biased networks and socialising	<i>“ If you have to choose between attending a work function to allow better opportunities to network and build career building connections or pay the bills – the bills win. So, I didn't go.</i>	Key 4: Get class inclusive on networks and socialising
5	Lock 5: The class ceiling	<i>“ It feels like the people who are promoted quickly seem to come from higher social class than others, they went to private schools, their families are higher class, they live in higher-class suburbs, they have networks with higher class [people].</i>	Key 5: Crack the class ceiling

DCA will share highlights and insights from this research via our various communications channels. DCA members can access the full Class Inclusion at Work report, which details practical actions to remove class barriers at work.

1. N Hester and E Hehman, “Dress is a fundamental component of person perception”, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2023, 27(4):414–433.
2. D Oh, E Shafir and A Todorov, “Economic status cues from clothes affect perceived competence from faces”, *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2019, 4(3):287–293.
3. B Tranter and R Grant, “A class act? Social background and body modifications in Australia”, *Journal of Sociology*, 2018, 54(3):412–428.
4. G Bellavance, “The multiplicity of highbrow culture: taste boundaries among the new upper middle class”, in L Hanquinet and M Savage (eds), *Routledge international handbook of the sociology of art and culture*, Routledge, 2015.
5. D Carter, “Jane Austen, Monet and Phantom of the Opera – middlebrow culture today”, *The Conversation*, 2020.
6. BL Beagan, EM Power and GE Chapman, ““Eating isn't just swallowing food”: food practices in the context of social class trajectory”, *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation*, 2015, 2(1):75–98.