Hiring Bias based on the Characteristics of Previous Employees in Companies

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Abstract

Diversity has become an essential role in recruitment. However, hiring bias is an unfamiliar word in recruitment. In this work, there is a hypothesis that the previous employee of a company would more or less become a benchmark when the company is seeking new employees to replace them. In order to offer a proof, a questionnaire is designed, which includes 5 dimensions for participants. These 5 dimensions are gender, personality, appearance, education background and origin of region. The work uses an unique insight to figure out the common extent of hiring bias. This experiment aims to offer everyone a new idea to see hiring bias and find the most effect way to recruit.

Keywords

Hiring bias; Recruitment; Gender; Appearance; Education background; Personality.

1. Introduction

Diversity and diversity management in multicultural workforce is increasingly becoming an important issue for the business in the era of globalization [1]. Nowadays, a number of companies aim to look for different talented people, valuing diversity and inclusion. Gradually, diversity has come to play an essential role in hiring. According to William and O'Reilly, diversity can be defined as the degree of heterogeneity among team members on specified demographic dimensions [2]. Companies value diversity because they recognize the necessity of a mix in the workplace. In order to gain a greater stability in a team, people from a broader range would be easily allocated to bring out the best and collaborate more efficiently. Greenberg also defines workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in an organization including race, gender, ethnic, group, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organizational function, education, background and more [3]. Regarding gender, Sander Hoogendoorn, Hessel Oosterbeek and Mirjam van Praagteams concluded that teams with an equal gender mix perform better than male-dominated teams in terms of sales and profits. Profits increase as the share of women increases up to 50%. For higher shares of women, the relation between profits and the share of women is flat [4]. Despite the trend of advocating diversity, bias still exists in hiring. For instance, according to Lincoln Quillian, Devah Pager, Arnfinn H. Midtbøen and Ole Hexel, hiring discrimination against black Americans hasn’t declined in last 25 years. Since 1990 white applicants received, on average, 36% more callbacks than black applicants and 24% more callbacks than Latino applicants with identical résumés. However, over time, based on 42708 applicants for 20990 positions, statistical tests indicate the evidence of decline is inconclusive, which means there is no change in rating rates for Black applicants [5].

Measured from different perspectives, the gaps in hiring might be different. To provide an alternative explanation for the common phenomenon in hiring, the hypothesis that the previous employee of a company would more or less become a benchmark when the company is seeking new employees to replace them is stated. Besides, the company will tend to hire
employees with similar characteristics to the previous employees in the same position. There are 5 dimensions are measured here. There is an assumed tendency in hiring: new employees have the similarity to the previous employees in gender, origin of region, education background, appearance, personality. As for gender, male and female are looked at. Education background shows the degree the person has got. Appearance refers to how attractive the person is. Region of origin refers to the province of birth. Personality indicates how the person perceives the world and his affected deeds. An experiment which provides experimental evidence would prove the hypothesis. The employees in the private tuition industry in China are focused. A laboratory experiment is conducted to compare the new job applicants and the previous employees in the abovementioned five dimensions.

1.1. Participant
In order to simplify and specify the experiment, the employees in the private tuition industry in China are participants. These employees come from HR department, so they are familiar with recruitment. They are responsible for looking at resumes and interview to decide whether they would hire the new employee. In addition, they are experienced since they have recruited a number of employees in the same position. By researching them, the result can be analyzed directly.

2. Procedure
To control variables, instead of using the real information of the previous employees, simulating the participant’s memory of the previous employee is preferred. In the real life, the participant’s impression of the previous employee would be affected by other factors, such as the certain period of time and what others think, which is hard to analyze and conclude. A part of memory of a pervious employee was implanted into the participant’s mind. The participant was asked to imagine a certain employee working as a teacher in the education center. Then, the participant was required to write a 500-words write-up to describe what they thought would be like if the teacher was actually working in the tuition center.
Four questions were included:
What do you think will happen during her first lesson in your institution?
What are some difficulties you think she will encounter working as a teacher?
What do you think are her strength and limitations?
In your opinion, will her students like her as a teacher?
In this case, the participant’s memory of the previous employee was simulated. A set of questions of the irrelevant information were given to the participants before the he or she was asked to assess a pile of 20 resumes of new job applicants provided. It could interfere with participants’ assumptions about the purpose of the experiment effectively. After the participants read resumes, they were asked to grade their hiring intention to each applicant from 1-5. 1 indicates that the participant was least likely to hire the applicant and 5 indicates that the participant was most likely to hire the applicant.

3. Method
Region, education background, appearance, gender and personality, these 5 dimensions were included in both descriptions of the previous employees and the resumes of the new applicants. For each dimension, similar measures were adopted.
As for gender, the description is whether the previous employee and the new applicant are male or female.
For education background, there are two categories: 985+211 and the others. “985 project” and “211 project” are the most common measure of success for universities in China. In recruiting, most companies or HRs make 985 and 211 as a hard criterion for applicants. People tend to perceive students graduated from 985 and 211 more outstanding [6]. The participant was told whether the previous employee graduated from 985/211 or not. Similarly, the university (985+211/the others) that the new applicant graduated from was listed on the simulated resume. It’s the most direct way to implant an impression of one’s education background.

For appearance, the work described how attractive the previous employee was. In the resume, the photo of the new applicant was attached. Before indicating whether the participant was willing to hire the new employee, he/she was asked to rate how attractive the new applicant was individually. The score is limited to a range of 1-5 based on the Likert scale. According to the Likert scale, applicants of the same gender who got the same scores were counted as somewhat similar in appearance [7].

The question: Do you agree that the person in the photo is attractive?
1: strongly disagree
2: don’t agree
3: not sure
4: agree
5: I couldn’t agree more

For region of origin, we told the participant which province in China the previous employee comes from. We listed the new applicant’s birthplace (province) on the simulated resume.

For personality, MBTI was adopted as a scale. MBTI is an introspective self-report questionnaire indicating differing psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. MBTI is composed of 4 dimensions: Extraversion and Introversion; Sensing and Intuition; Thinking and Feeling; Judgement and Perception [8]. Each person is said to have one preferred quality from each category, producing 16 unique types. The MBTI was constructed for normal populations and emphasizes the value of naturally occurring differences [9].

For each dimension in MBTI, according to the definition, descriptions of the questions in MBTI rating scale were found. Then these descriptions were quantified to ensure that the descriptions of features in Memory and Resume are the same and applied them. Descriptions of the previous employee and the new applicant were formed based on these 5 dimensions in MBTI.

4. Definition

Do you prefer to focus on the outer world or on your own inner world? This is called Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I).

Information: Do you prefer to focus on the basic information you take in or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? This is called Sensing (S) or Intuition (N).

Decisions: When making decisions, do you prefer to first look at logic and consistency or first look at the people and special circumstances? This is called Thinking (T) or Feeling (F).

Structure: In dealing with the outside world, do you prefer to get things decided or do you prefer to stay open to new information and options? This is called Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)[7].

Characteristics provided for the previous employees would be used to compare against the characteristics of the new applicants to get the degree of similarity between the two subjects.
After grading their hiring intention to each applicant, based on the five dimensions, the description of the previous employee and the participant’s 500-words writing to conduct the similarity between the two was reviewed. There was an order of the resumes by alluding to the scores of each participant and the particular characteristics of the portrayal in the simulated resume. One group was similar to the previous employees, while the other group was not. By comparing the scores of these two kinds of recruiting expectations, the results could discover whether there would be a comparability between the characteristics of the previous employees and the new applicants which were most likely to be recruited.

5. Results

Each time one dimension was measured, which was easy for us to control variables. The simulated memory we implanted once was supposed to affected one variable. The groups as the dimension group members were measured. Table 1 represents the scores of different dimensions graded by different groups of participants. It could be inferred from table 1 below that there was no significant difference in the data of one vertical axis except for the gray areas. The variance to analyze the data was calculated and a conclusion was conducted. If the results proved the hypothesis, the statement that some characteristics of previous employees will affect the decisions of people from Human Resources when hiring new applicants could be inferred. Furthermore, they will tend to hire employees with similar characteristics to the previous employees in the same position. Among these 5 dimensions, the new applicant who has similar personality with the previous employee is more likely to get the job. It followed by appearance, gender, region and educational background.

Table 1. The scores of different dimensions graded by different groups of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants/Resume</th>
<th>1Personality</th>
<th>2Gender</th>
<th>3Education Background</th>
<th>4Region</th>
<th>5Appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(Personality)</td>
<td>Gray Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(Gender)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grey Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(Education Background)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grey Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4(Region)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grey Areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5(Appearance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grey Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6(Control Group)</td>
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If the results obtained are not so strong that could prove the hypothesis, whether the experiment was turned out correctly would be considered. There might have been some variables which were not anticipated by experimenters but affected the results. For instance, too much information listed made participants realized the purpose of the experiment. They wouldn’t think in their original and expected way. Thus, the results were subject to error. Altering the experiment would be considered. Trying to obtain previous employees’ information and comparing it with the new applicants’ that participants have selected would be included.
6. Conclusion

The work still has limitations. Firstly, our test subject is too narrow because the work only focused on the employees in the private tuition industry in China. The conclusion may not be universal. Secondly, the 5 dimensions as the measure are too limited. In the experiment, there are only five dimensions were measured, namely personality, appearance, gender, educational background and region of origin. On the one hand, these 5 dimensions are not be affected by other factors except the characteristics of the previous employees could not be guaranteed. On the other hand, there might be other missing dimensions which will affect the decisions of participants.

If the hypothesis can be proved, it can offer an effective explanation for the bias in hiring. That’s why some companies prefer a certain kind of employees. It also provides employees from Human Resources and management a new development idea. They should jump out of the “comfort zone” to find more creative and talented people who might be completely different from their favorite previous employees. In some cases, when a company face a business transformation, hiring the same type of employees might not be a wise decision. “The same type” means that they might have similar thinking mode and crisis management. It’s not good for a company which is planning a transformation. Hiring different kinds of employees brings uncertainty which might be either positive or negative. Although the result of hiring new employees which are totally different from the previous employees, diversity and creativity they have are valuable. The outsiders usually see the best of the game. People with different mindset can be clear to read the situation. The work and the results would offer ideas from different perspectives to everyone in need.

References