The Objective Interview Process Is Here

Is Your Organization Ready?

TALENT INTELLIGENCE

POWERING HIGH-PERFORMANCE

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Executive Summary

Bias, whether it's unintentional or more overt, negatively affects the hiring process; yet eliminating it can be challenging. Even the most well-intentioned efforts can fail to remove the risk of bias, potentially causing businesses to overlook qualified candidates, make ineffective hiring choices and possibly face legal repercussions.

Technological advancements have, however, led to the introduction of a number of tools and new practices in recent years that can help prevent bias from impacting employers' recruiting and hiring decisions. By changing the way organizations review resumes, conduct interviews and otherwise screen candidates, companies are now able to more objectively assess applicants with better results.

This white paper will explain some of the key bias issues organizations can encounter when hiring; the methods and technological options that are currently available to help reduce or remove any influence bias may have — and the beneficial outcomes companies can achieve from embracing a new, more impartial approach to evaluating job candidates' skills and background.

For years, companies have struggled to overcome often unintentional hiring bias-related issues — a goal that's been difficult for many to achieve.

Bias can factor into an employer's hiring decisions due to the way a number of common recruiting practices are structured. Resumes and other materials, for instance, may either directly or indirectly identify a candidate's age. Names that suggest a certain gender can trigger preconceived notions of how men or women perform in the workplace. Other details, ranging from a candidate's current address to the region where the person obtained a degree, can also prompt interviewers to react a certain way.

The consequences can be considerable. In addition to being unfair, hiring biases can create a poor candidate experience. If jobseekers share their feelings about the encounter online or in personal conversations with colleagues, a company can begin to be perceived negatively in the talent marketplace, causing it to lose out on qualified candidates.

Nearly all — 95 percent — of the managers, recruiters and other hiring professionals who participated in a Jibe survey said they feel the quality of a company's candidate experience can have an impact on its overall employer brand.

Companies that choose a lesser candidate over a qualified one because of bias can also incur an expense. A single bad hire costs businesses more than $18,700, on average, according to recent CareerBuilder research. Twenty-four percent of hiring and human resource managers report their organization has experienced reduced productivity because of bad hires, and a quarter say they've negatively affected employee morale.

A 2015 study suggests bias could even have a lingering effect on a job candidate's future performance if the person is hired. The study found interviews conducted by men with a strong implicit bias resulted in lower applicant self-evaluations of their interview. Presumably, working with a supervisor who has similarly biased views might affect an employee's confidence and motivation on an ongoing basis.

Because unconscious bias can involve predetermined views individuals don't necessarily realize they possess, eradicating it from the recruiting process can be a particularly complicated undertaking.
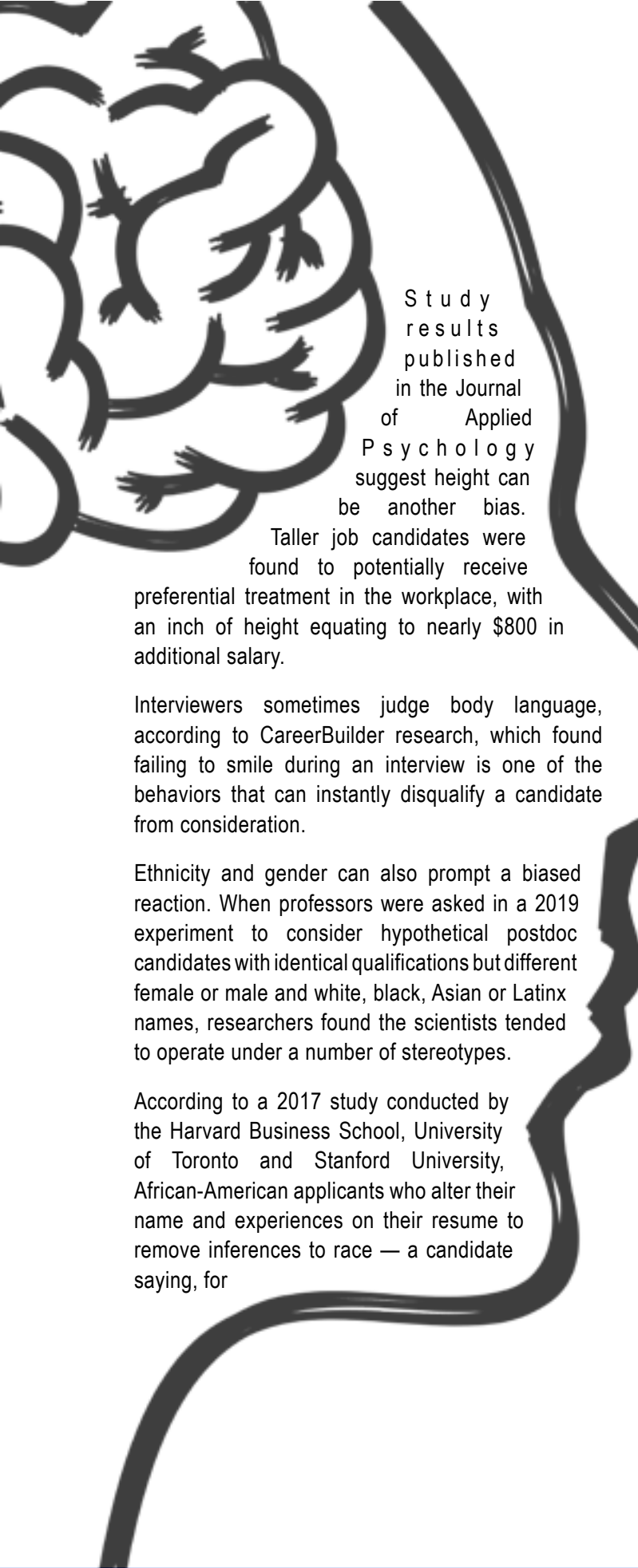
A number of techniques however, including some that are fueled by new technology, are helping organizations lessen the chance preconceived notions will factor into any screening steps — offering hope that employers in numerous industries may someday be able to almost eliminate bias when hiring new employees.

ISSUES THAT MAY EMERGE

Bias can involve a number of skewed views — which may be expressed in various ways when candidates are being considered for a position.

In some instances, hiring-related biases can involve physical, mental and other attributes jobseekers possess. One study, for example, involving applicants who were introduced to mock employers with and without prostheses that made them appear to be obese found an interview bias exists against overweight job candidates, particularly if they are female.

Study results published in the Journal of Applied Psychology suggest height can be another bias. Taller job candidates were found to potentially receive preferential treatment in the workplace, with an inch of height equating to nearly $800 in additional salary.

Interviewers sometimes judge body language, according to CareerBuilder research, which found failing to smile during an interview is one of the behaviors that can instantly disqualify a candidate from consideration.

Ethnicity and gender can also prompt a biased reaction. When professors were asked in a 2019 experiment to consider hypothetical postdoc candidates with identical qualifications but different female or male and white, black, Asian or Latinx names, researchers found the scientists tended to operate under a number of stereotypes.

According to a 2017 study conducted by the Harvard Business School, University of Toronto and Stanford University, African-American applicants who alter their name and experiences on their resume to remove inferences to race — a candidate saying, for example, that he managed first-year student orientation events, instead of listing a Black Students' Association peer counselor role — would receive more 2.5 more callbacks than applicants who included ethnic identity details.

Another recent study conducted by French researchers found hiring committees who deny promoting women is a problem in their organization are actually less likely to promote female workers. Similarly, a 2013 academic study found male and female managers were twice as likely to hire a man for a mathematical position instead of a female candidate.

Generational bias, too, can be a problem. Resumes containing keywords that offer cues about a candidate's age — such as seemingly old-fashioned activities that would suggest the applicant was older — received the lowest job suitability ratings in a study conducted by researchers from Belgium's Ghent University.

In some instances, instead of taking the time to thoroughly assess a candidate's capabilities, interviewers may make a rushed conclusion about the person that's based on initial observations and personal biases. More than half of hiring managers (51 percent) say they know within the first five minutes of an interview if a candidate is a good fit for a position, according to a CareerBuilder survey.

That's not an ideal scenario. Assuming that job candidates may be nervous — and, according to Monster data, the majority of hiring errors occur in the first 30 minutes of an interview — an employer's first impression, driven by preconceived notions more than actual facts, can be far from accurate.

HOW COMPANIES ARE WORKING TO DIMINISH BIAS

Objectivity can be difficult to achieve in any process that relies heavily on human input and assessment — which is why technology has proven to be such an asset in the recruiting process.

Advancements in recent years have enhanced employers' ability to screen and measure candidates' skill sets more fairly. As a result, some companies have begun utilizing a number of methods to help reduce the risk of bias, which can include:

Gauging abilities through actions

The resume and other documentation candidates provide can invoke bias related to, for example, the timeframe in which an individual completed an educational program. While the candidate may have a perfectly valid reason for obtaining a degree outside of the traditional four-year time period — such as financial hardship or childcare commitments — it may influence how ambitious, dedicated or available some interviewers perceive an applicant to be.

To prevent that kind of bias from occurring, some organizations have started providing a pre-employment skills test during the hiring process to assess the likelihood someone would succeed in a role, instead of relying primarily on a resume or other background materials to gauge candidates' abilities. A study that examined 19 assessment techniques found giving a work sample test that involves a hands-on job simulation can be one of the top three predictors of how a candidate will perform in a role.

Blind hiring

Photos and identifying information, such as a candidate's name, can be removed from applicant tracking data, online job boards and social media sites like LinkedIn using a number of technological solutions.

Concealing identifying information that relates to qualities such as a candidate's gender or educational background can help prevent the chance an interviewer will impose any sexist, xenophobic or other prejudices when screening candidates.

Research conducted in several countries, published in the IZA Journal of European Labor Studies, indicates that although the practice could potentially prevent employers from favoring minority applicants in the initial stage of the hiring process, anonymous job applications, in most cases, will increase disadvantaged groups' interview invitation probability.

Focusing on behavioral data

Because objectivity is difficult to achieve in any human-driven process, technology has proven to be the essential asset in the recruiting process

Instead of fixating on subjective details that won't indicate future job performance, the questions initial interviewers ask should help them fully understand an applicant's skill set — and gather valuable information other decisionmakers can potentially use when assessing the candidate.

Employing behavioral interviewing techniques —

asking candidates to describe real-life scenarios in which they've achieved goals, handled challenges or completed certain tasks — rather than asking about hypothetical scenarios or basic background facts can help organizations avoid bias and assess candidates accurately, based on their strengths and weaknesses.

Sixty-nine percent of hiring managers, for instance, in Canada, the U.K., the Netherlands, Australia, India and the U.S. said in a LinkedIn survey that adaptability is the most important soft skill they screen for — by asking candidates, for example, to describe a situation where they had embraced a new system or technology at work, or what applicants had learned when they'd been asked to do something they'd never done before.

Multiple and/or team-based interviews

Companies may rely heavily on hiring managers to screen and choose candidates during busy times or when a role needs to be filled quickly; however, having jobseekers meet with only one or two professionals within an organization creates a situation in which bias could be more possible.

Having multiple people within an organization assess candidates in panel interviews and/or several rounds of interviews can help provide a more balanced take on applicants' viability. It may also help engage candidates — 39 percent feel it's important to meet their potential coworkers, and 43 want to be introduced to the person in the role they may be assuming, according to an Engage2Excel survey. Nearly half — 47 percent — say they'd be comfortable with an interview panel that is comprised of two to three people.

Writing non-biased job descriptions

Distributing a neutral job description without any references to gender or other identifying qualities can help companies avoid alienating candidates to recruit a wider applicant base. Some potential candidates may otherwise fail to find the listing when conducting keyword-based searches — or decide they aren't a good fit for the position.

Research has indicated, though, job descriptions don't always sound completely impartial. A study from the University of Waterloo and Duke University, for instance, found job descriptions for positions in male-dominated areas tend to use language typically associated with male stereotypes, such as leader, competitive and dominant, more often than descriptions for jobs within female-dominated areas do.

Much like the tech tools that are available to remove personal information from applicant materials, programs exist that can help determine if the tone of a job description skews toward one gender — and identify words predictive analytics suggest would be
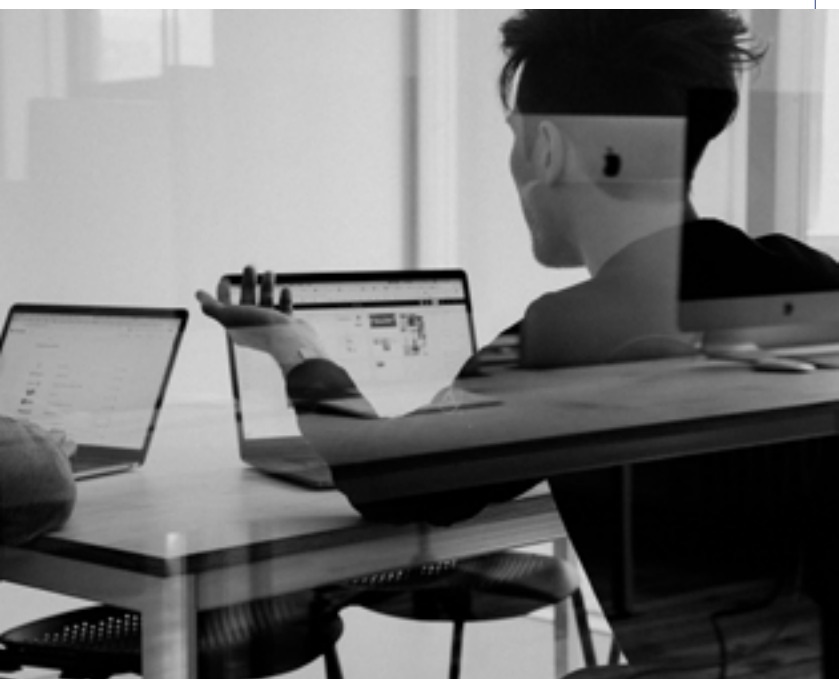
the most relevant, gender-neutral terms to use.

Tapping into talent rediscovery tools

Artificial intelligence-based software can automatically screen candidates who have previously applied for a job and are listed in an organization's candidate tracking system database to see if they might be a valid option for an open position's requirements.

To fully utilize talent rediscovery software, though, companies will need to ensure the data in their applicant tracking system is accurate — which may be an issue for some organizations, given that People Data Labs research found 78 percent of the candidate information in applicant tracking programs isn't.

Offering training and education

Informing staff about unconscious bias — including what signs indicate it may be occurring and tactics to prevent it from influencing their opinion — can help reduce the likelihood bias will hinder the interview process.

Organizations may want to consider encouraging professionals who are involved in recruiting and hiring-related decision-making, including company leadership, to take bias-oriented self-assessment tests — such as the free Implicit Association Test created by researchers from Harvard University, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington, which can help determine if respondents connect career- and family-related terms to a specific gender.

MOVING FORWARD WITHOUT BIAS

In the past, bias — even if entirely unintentional — may have been viewed as a somewhat unavoidable factor that could enter into the administrative and managerial aspects of recruiting and hiring at any point.

With the advanced technological tools and procedures companies are able to employ today, however, the chance of unintentional bias occurring in candidate interviews or other hiring process stages can be greatly reduced.

Methods such as organizational bias training, thoughtful job description phrasing and panel-based interviews can help organizations avoid having bias alter their recruiting efforts. To maximize the effect of these next-level processes and tools, employers may also benefit from partnering with a talent service provider that can assist them in locating and utilizing bias-free techniques to accurately screen and select the best candidates.

Talent Intelligence's Role Profile Analysis methodology identifies the key characteristics and behaviors that will enable a candidate to thrive in a position, helping businesses successfully find professionals to fill existing and future roles who align with the organization's strategic vision.

By providing a framework to measure how new hires perform in regard to critical industry knowledge and skills, employees know exactly what's expected of them — and their employer is able to obtain a 360-degree view of its hiring practices to determine if any need to be adjusted.

For more information about how the Role Profile Analysis system obtains insight and what benefits it can provide, contact Josh Davis, Director of Innovation, at +1 (312) 523-6484 or josh.davis@talentintelligence.com