Best Practices for Mitigating Cognitive Biases in the Hiring Process

UBC

Cognitive biases can significantly inhibit equity in hiring by influencing the decision-making process, which can lead to unconscious discrimination. It is important for hiring committees to be aware of the potential for biases and take steps to mitigate their effects when screening and interviewing candidates.

Affinity Bias

The tendency to prefer candidates who are like ourselves- shared background, race, gender, interests, etc.

Example: I like a candidate because I relate to them- we were born in the same area, we went to the same schools for undergrad and med. school, we majored in the same things... we just "click" in a way that I don't with the other candidates.

Bandwagon Effect

The tendency to prefer candidates based on the preferences of other influencers, rather than working to reach a genuine consensus.

Example: I vote for the candidate who has the most votes among the other hiring committee members, rather than considering each candidate's merits and advocating for who I think would truly be the best for our team.

Confirmation Bias

The tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information about candidates in a way that confirms or supports our prior beliefs or values.

Example: "It is better to be safe than sorry." Therefore, I feel that the candidate who comes from a traditional academic pedigree for the role is a "safer" and better choice than the candidate who has a diversity of experience outside of the role and has taken a non-traditional academic path.

Recency Effect

The tendency to favor the candidate we have most recently met or learned about.

Example: After interviewing several candidates, I am more easily able to identify reasons I prefer the last candidate; I have forgotten many of the reasons I felt the earlier candidates would be a good fit, even if those reasons were stronger than the reasons I have for liking the last candidate.

Halo Effect

Similar to affinity bias (above), the tendency to view a candidate in a more positive light overall because of a perceived positive trait.

Example: I see on a candidate's resume that they were once an Olympic skier; I now believe that their talent and work ethic for the position are of the same Olympic caliber, which no other candidate is able to match.

Fundamental Attribution Error

The tendency to overlook situational and environmental factors for the behavior of a candidate while overemphasizing dispositional or personality factors.

Example: Even though the candidate had a very good reason that was beyond their control for needing to reschedule the interview, I will still (consciously or unconsciously) hold it against them in my final decision because they now seem unreliable.

Practices to Mitigate Cognitive Biases in Hiring

Rubrics
- Create a common rubric
- Stick to it
- Minimize the impact of non-rubric factors and influences

Personal Note-Taking*
- Take good and detailed notes
- Recognize that you will forget details and be sure to capture them in your notes
- Review your notes to recall your thoughts in the moment

Reminders
- Remind team members about cognitive biases throughout the process
- Remind team members to review their notes
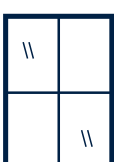
Transparency
- As a hiring committee- be transparent about the true needs for the position
- Be transparent with the candidates about the purpose and goals of each step of the process

Reflection
- Reflect on the process and make adjustments
- Consider keeping a journal to capture the thoughts, priorities, challenges, and outcomes of the hiring process

Shuffling
- Vary the order in which candidates are presented to the committees throughout the process

*The Office of the University Counsel's guidelines outline several additional recommendations regarding the content, use, and handling of personal notes created during the hiring and interview process.