

Human Resource Management

**“Bias and methods of solutions in the selection
process of recruiting new employees”**

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I. Introduction

First of all it is important to define some basic terms concerning the topic.

Selection is the final stage of the recruitment process when a decision is going to be made who the successful candidate will be. This is a very important decision for the organisation as the cost of a selection mistake can be very high. An unqualified or inappropriate employee can decrease the performance of the whole team.

In order to minimise such mistakes it is necessary to avoid bias and discrimination during the selection process.

Yet the basic objective in selection is to discriminate, otherwise you cannot decide who may be selected or rejected.

For that reason it is important whether the discrimination is fair (i.e. unbiased) or unfair (i.e. biased).

The reasons for similar treatment are either economic issues, as I mentioned before, moral issues or because the company do not wish to be caught breaking the law.

The question is however, to what extent the selection process could eliminate bias and promote equal opportunities.

For that reason it is necessary to describe briefly the legislation in terms of equal opportunities, some important selection procedures and possible unfair discrimination occurring at those ones.

Finally I want to describe methods to avoid or reduce unfair treatment, in order to see to what extent it is possible.

II. The Legislation

One should be aware of the impact of the following pieces of legislation:(Straw, 1989, p.16-20)

- Sex Discrimination Acts (1975, 1986)
- Race Relations Act (1976)
- Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

These Acts make it unlawful for organisations to take into account a person's gender, marital status, colour, race or disability in employment, in our case especially in selection decisions. So these Acts shall theoretically reduce the extent of unfair treatment.

The problem is however that what the House of Lords has already stated in 1972:

“Nobody believes that legislation by itself can eradicate overnight a whole range of attitudes which are rooted in custom and are, for that very reason, often unchallenged because unrecognised. But if the law cannot change attitudes overnight, it can, and does effect change slowly” (Beardwell / Holden, 1997, p.239).

III. Important Selection Methods

1. Psychological tests

Brief explanation

The justification for tests in the field of selection is the belief that scores on those tests have some validity in predicting future job performance.

Psychological testing involves a set of instruments, which are frequently categorised under the headings of intelligence tests, ability and aptitude tests, and interest and personality tests.

Intelligence tests are tests of verbal and numerical ability. When people score highly on those tests they are said to have a good capacity to absorb new information, pass examinations and pick up things quickly and perform well at work.

Aptitude tests can measure specific abilities and are used to gauge the person's potential.

According to Beech and McKenna (1995) personality has a bearing on the competence of the individual to perform effectively and that defects could nullify the beneficial aspects stemming from having the appropriate aptitude or ability. For instance, a highly motivated, psychologically well-adjusted employee is of greater value to a company than an employee who is emotionally unstable and demotivated.

One should also consider that there could be a danger of recruiting the same or similar personality types and producing a situation where there is a lack of variety in the personality composition of work teams.

Discrimination and solutions

Tests are designed to discriminate among individuals. If everyone received the same score, the test would be useless for making selection decisions. They are used to identify people who are likely to be more qualified for a job than others.

It is highly probable that on any particular test, one could detect average differences between men and women, but it does not necessarily imply that they are unfair.

Test differences are generally intended to be objective in nature with no value judgement involved.

In order to guarantee that objectivity there should be no room for interpretation within the test for the examiner and the prediction of the future job performance should be in terms of the test score.

If, for instance, the criterion performance of one group is systematically higher or lower than predicted from their test score, the prediction could be biased in favour of or against members of that group.

For that reason there should be a solution template, so that the test is reliable and compulsory free of bias (the same score at a measurement at another time and another examiner).

It is also a sensible device to allot each candidate a number, so that assessors are unaware of the sex or nationality of the candidate when marking papers.

A survey in America between blacks and whites found out that blacks regularly scored worse (Arvey / Faley, 1988, p.123).

We can convert this example to any test involving ethnic groups.

According to those researchers possible reasons could be different environmental factors, genetic or innate differences, factors inherent in the test itself e.g. culturally biased items, unfamiliar test content) or the test environment (e.g. anxiety) .

Solutions can be a friendly, non-intimidate test environment. They also could be given a kind of bonus e.g. 2 extra score points . But this treatment could lead into reverse discrimination of the majority, so that they feel desperately treated. Therefore, in my point of view, it is better if we do not use that but develop a solely job-related test without questions, which only local applicants could answer correctly.

2. Interview

Interviewing is probable the most popular selection technique, which offers the opportunity for a two- way exchange of information. Since there are human beings talking to each other judgements are possible which are likely not reasonable and highly subjective. One should consider that the likes and dislikes of the interviewer will not necessarily be shared by others in the organisation. They are, therefore, in most situations, of little importance. The interview process is therefore particularly vulnerable to bias, prejudices, and stereotypes. One example may reinforce that these.

According to the Society for The Psychological Study of Social Issues there are stereotypical characteristics associated with males and females (Arvey / Faley, 1988, p.216).

Males	Females
adventurous	appearance-oriented
aggressive	artistic
competitive	dependent
confident	emotional
dominant	neat
independent	passive
rough	talkative

Although some characteristics might be predominant at one sex, one should not make the mistake of generalization.

Apart from those stereotypes, there are also other pitfalls, which minimize objectivity during an interview and which are briefly mentioned.

- There is for example a tendency for interviewers to arrive at a judgement early on in the interview.
- Due to bias it is also possible to highlight negative data in order to support their fixed opinions.
- The “halo” effect is where the interviewer is positively disposed towards interviewees for several reasons (e.g. attraction), so that there is no room for an objective elaborating of the content of what they say.
- The “horn” effect means that the interviewer hears the worst in what the applicant is saying (Beech / McKenna, 1995, p.104).

Possible Solutions

In order to promote equal opportunities through a more objective judgement one could offer a training programme for those, who conduct interviews, so that they learn to pay attention to objectives signs.

According to the Equal Opportunities Commission (1986, p.26-7) there are many trained interviewers at the earlier stages of the process, because there is a “weeding out” stage carried out by personnel departments, head hunters or agencies. But the final interviews are normally conducted by line managers, of whom very few have any training in this most difficult technique.

Another opportunity is the using of a panel rather than a one to one interview, so that there are several impressions, which all together can design a just and average judgement.

Then it is also more likely to reduce the amount of indirect bias such as the “halo” and the “horn” effects.

The first impression could be changed, if some open ended rather than Yes/No questions are asked so that the interviewee would have the opportunity to overcome the interviewers bias and convince him of the own strengths.

For that reason a reasonable amount of time should be allocated for the interviewee and generally each interviewer should receive the same time allocated.

Tosi and Einbender(1985) reviewed 21 studies investigating gender bias and showed that judges faced with limited information about candidate competence or job requirements tended to make bias or stereotyped judgements, those with more information did not (Arvey / Faley, 1988, p.234).

Therefor it is important to provide interviewers with the appropriate documentation like job specification, job description, completed application form , CV) well in advance and to ensure that they are carefully studied before the start of the interview.

Another way to minimise bias is to instruct interviewers in the kind of questions tainted with bias like non-job-related-questions weather one wish to have children or intend to marry.

The answer could produce unreasonable bias, so they should not be asked.

Furthermore there are some relevant cases which make it unlawful to ask those kinds of questions e.g. the Industrial Tribunal held in “Miss H.S.Gates v. Wirral Borough Council” that questions at interviews relating to applicant’s marital status were discriminating.

3. Assessment Centres

Assessment centres use a variety of selection methods.

An important part of it is the evaluation of the candidates' interactive and interpersonal skills in a group exercise by trained assessors, psychologists and line managers as well.

For that reason it is an intensive process, time- consuming and costly.

Apart from the costs assessment centres have high validity as a selection device.

One recent publication summarized some existing research which suggested that the probability of selecting an "above average performer" on a random basis was 15 per cent, a figure that rose to 35 per cent using appraisal and interviewing data and to 76 per cent using assessment centre results (Beaumont, 1993, p.67).

The question is here as well, whether equal opportunities are guaranteed or better to what extent.

There are several studies examining that question e.g. Moses and Boehm(1975) examined the ratings of over 4.500 women who had been evaluated in an assessment centre compared to a sample of men.

According to that study and to other studies done, the assessment centre techniques appear to be "fair" based on race, sex, and age, because their ratings were almost the same (Arvey / Faley, 1988, p.187-191).

Due to the length of between one and three days existing bias are more likely to build down, because the applicants are given the chance to convince their assessors during several exercises.

For that reason assessment centres have received positive support from the courts and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

IV. Conclusion

In order to promote objectivity and equal opportunity one should not rely on one selection method. In addition to an interview I would recommend biodata at least, as past performance and behaviour can predict future one.

Since human beings, who may have their own experiences with special nationalities and sexes, assess other ones there is always a subjective view of the assessor, which influences the final selection indirectly at least.

For that reason only trained assessors should conduct interviews and evaluate tests and applicants.

In order to promote equal opportunities there must be a change in our minds in terms of special attitudes towards other nationalities, sexes and disabled people.

One try to change it is special legislation, prohibiting discrimination. But the Acts do not require that employer do anything to promote equality (Beardwell / Holden, 1997, p.239).

Nevertheless these are important Acts in my point of view, as it take time to change opinions and eliminate bias and such Acts make people think and discuss about this theme.

In order to guarantee equal opportunities during the selection process there should be an equal opportunity policy within the organisation, known by every employee through house magazines or publicity campaigns like at Littlewoods or Barclays Bank (Straw, 1989, p.104-112).

Then it would be more likely that everyone consider about their own opinion and that everyone get familiar with the importance of equal treatment e.g. in matters concerning training or development or in this case during the selection process.

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