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Investigating Employer Personality Types and Hiring Applicants to Match

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Abstract

Research shows that employers will be more likely to hire applicants who fit the Big Five Inventories dimension of conscientiousness (Sackett & Walmsley 2014). While personality is a popular area for research, there has been little to no research done to determine if employers will hire applicants who seem to match their own personality types. The purpose of this study is to determine if employers will select applicants who seem to match his/her personality type. It was also speculated that narcissistic individuals would be more likely to hire other narcissistic individuals. Results revealed several significant correlations that provide new insight to the area of employer/applicant personality types. In this study it was determined that the most hired applicant fit the dimension of conscientiousness. It was also found that employers who fit the dimensions of openness and agreeableness were significantly more likely to hire applicants who fit the personality type to match. The applicant who fit the dimension of narcissistic/neurotic was found to be the least likely to hire by almost all (93%) of the participants. The implications of the findings will be discussed further in the following manuscript.

Introduction

The United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics reported that 5,148 individuals were hired in December of 2014 (United States Department of Labor, 2015). While most individuals believe they are hired because they are most qualified for the position, it could stand to reason that these individuals are hired because of their personality traits more than their qualifications (Funder, 2013). Research suggests that personality during an interview can influence an employer's decision (Caldwell & Burger, 1998).

Many employers will administer integrity tests in addition to the oral interview process (Funder, 2013). It is estimated that upwards of 13% of employers are utilizing personality tests as part of their hiring process (SIOP, 2015). These integrity tests are intended to measure personality type and other qualities including work ethic, consistency, energy level, cheerfulness, dependability, and long term job commitment (Funder, 2013). Further research conducted by Sackett and Walmsley (2014) confirm that employers favor individuals who possess conscientiousness and agreeableness regardless of the complexity of the job.

Another personality type of interest in the business world is narcissism. Cambell, Goodie, and Foster (2004) defined Narcissism as "a dynamic social construct with two key elements: a positive, inflated, and agentic view of the self; and a self-regulatory strategy to maintain and enhance this positive self-view." Although the image of a narcissistic person is often negative, research suggests that the right amount of narcissism can be beneficial (International Business Times. 2011). Current research revealed that overconfidence in one's own abilities can give a person an advantage when he is unsure of an opponent's strengths as well as an advantage when faced with a new or unfamiliar situation (International Business Times. 2011).

It is broadly accepted that employers seek out and hire individuals who are conscientious due to their highly reliable and achievement-oriented traits (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Additional research shows that this phenomenon is similar across cultures (Ho, Welbourne & Howard, 2014). Research conducted in many Asian cultures report employers search for the typical western idea of conscientiousness in applicants as well as individuals who can keep "harmony" in the workplace (Ho et al., 2014).

The idea of keeping harmony in the workplace led researchers to ponder if employers would seek out applicants whose personality type would match their personality type in order to reduce conflict. This study will investigate whether employers hire employees of the same personality type as their own. Researchers hypothesize that employers will hire employees that have the same personality type as themselves. Researchers also hypothesize that an employer will not hire an applicant with a narcissistic personality type if the employer is narcissistic himself.

Method

Participants

Twenty-seven undergraduate students (17 females and 10 males; average age=19, SD=2.8) from a mid-sized university in the Southwest were recruited. The sample consists of 51.9% Caucasians, 7.4% Black/African American, 29.6% Latino/a or Hispanic, 3.7% Asian/ Asian American. Participants volunteered to participate in this research to fulfill a course requirement or receive extra credit for a psychology course.

Materials

Descriptive Data. A questionnaire requesting information about each participant's age, gender, ethnicity, collegiate year and major was administered to participants.

Personality.   The participants completed the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; Oliver &

Benet-Martinez, 1998). The BFI is a personality inventory used to assess personality traits.

Participants responded to items such as "I see myself as someone who is talkative" on a Likert-

type scale ranging from 1(disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

Narcissism. The participants completed the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory

(NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), to assess the narcissism of participants. Participants chose between

two options such as "I have a natural talent for influencing people" or "I am not good at

influencing people". These questions were awarded points for each item chosen that matched the

scoring key and assed to determine the level of narcissism.

Vignettes. The participants were asked to read a short vignette that led them to believe

they were in charge of hiring a new employee for the book keeping positon at their company.

Participants were told that the following descriptions of the applicants was information collected

at the time of the interview as well as observations from other staff members at a social event the

applicants attended. The participant then read descriptions for 5 applicants for the book keeping

positon. Each description was designed to match one of the five personality dimensions from the

Big Five Inventory. An example of what the participants would have seen is below.

> Applicant 2-During the interview process this applicant provided a well-
> structured and organized resume. This applicant was able to take notes during the
> interview while asking and answering questions at the same time. The applicant
> was careful to note the names of all of the employees introduced to during
> interview.
>
> "this applicant stayed late to help clean up after the party and did not leave until
> all of the cleaning was done"
>
> "although most others at the party had several alcoholic beverages, this applicant
> had one glass of wine"

Employee Selection Questionnaire. Participants responded to questions about the applicants they had read about in the vignettes. Participants started by answering if they would hire each applicant such as "I would hire applicant # 3" on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1(disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Next participants were asked to list which applicant they are most likely to hire and in 3-5 sentences why they would hire that applicant. Next participants responded to statements about the perceived skills of the applicants such as "I believe the applicant that I selected is very competent" on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1(disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Lastly participants were asked to rank the order in which they would be most likely to hire the applicants.

Procedure

As participants entered the classroom, they were instructed to sign in and were assigned a seat. Participants were given consent to participate form and upon signed completion of the form; participants were given instructions on completing the materials. First, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, immediately followed by the Big Five Inventory, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. Lastly participants were given a folder containing the vignettes and the employee selection questionnaire and were asked to carefully the vignettes and complete the final questionnaire located in the back pocket of the folder. After completing all the forms, participants were fully debriefed and dismissed.

Results

A bivariate correlation was conducted between Narcissistic Personality Inventory, gender, applicant ranking, likelihood to hire, and all five dimensions of the Big Five Inventory. There was a positive correlation between agreeableness (*M*=3.75, *SD*=0.57) and who the participant selected to hire (*M*=2.83, *SD*=0.36), *r*=0.61, *p*<0.4. Individuals who reported higher scores on agreeableness are significantly more likely to select applicants who also report higher

scores on agreeableness. Researchers also found a positive correlation between openness (*M*=3.29, *SD*=0.36) and who the participant selected to hire (*M*=2.83, *SD*=0.36), *r*=0.60, *p*<0.4. Individuals who reported higher scores on openness were significantly more likely to select applicants who also reported higher scores openness. A significant negative correlation was found between gender (*M*=1.37, *SD*=0.49) and hiring applicant four (*M*=5.78, *SD*=1.09), *r*=-0.49, *p*<0.01. Females were less likely to hire applicants who fit the agreeableness dimension. There was also a significant negative correlation between gender (*M*=1.37, *SD*=0.49) and who the participant selected to hire (M=2.93, *SD*=1.41), *r*=-0.40, *p*<0.04. Female participants were significantly more likely to select applicant 2, whom fits the dimension of conscientiousness; as the applicant they are most likely to hire. A positive correlation was found between likelihood to hire applicant five (*M*=5.7, *SD*=1.06) and who the participant hired (M=2.93, *SD*=1.41), *r*=0.55, *p*<0.003. Individuals who reported that they would hire applicant five, selected applicant five as the applicant they selected to hire. Over half (52%) of the participants selected applicant 2 as the applicant they would be most likely to hire. The second highest reported applicant to be hired (with a hiring rate of 25%), was for applicant 5 which fits the dimension of openness. The hiring rate for agreeableness and extraversion was insignificant. Only 2 of the 27 participants selected applicant 1, which fits the dimension of neurotic/narcissist individual, as the applicant they were most likely to hire. Interestingly, 81% of participants reported that applicant 1 would be the last applicant they would hire. No significant data were found supporting the hypothesis that narcissistic individuals would not hire other narcissistic individuals.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine if employers would hire applicants who matched their personality type. Two significant correlations were found to support this theory.

Researchers also wanted to determine if narcissistic individuals would not hire other narcissistic individuals if the employer was narcissistic. Researchers were unable to find any significant data to support this theory.

Researchers were able to show that employers who fit the Big Five dimensions of agreeableness or openness are significantly more likely to hire potential applicants whom they believe fit the same personality types as themselves. Because there has not been enough research done to determine if employers hire applicants who match their personality type, there is no supported theories available to explain why this phenomenon was found. It could be speculated that individuals who are agreeable or open will want to avoid conflict and may believe that if the applicant shares similar personality traits then the employer will be more likely to hire that applicant.

When demographical information was incorporated into the correlational analyses, it was found that females were significantly less likely to hire applicants who fit the dimension of agreeableness. It is possible that this correlation was due to agreeable individuals' inability to successfully integrate family and work lives. Zaman and colleagues (2014) have investigated the abilities of conscientious and agreeable individuals to successfully manage both work and family lives. While conscientious and agreeable individuals are most desired personality types in the working field, agreeable individuals are not very successful once they start their families (Zaman, Anis-ul-Haque & Nawaz, 2014). It is suspected that the traits that are associated with agreeableness such as soft hearted and sympathetic may hinder the individual's ability to perform well at work when a family member is sick at home (Zaman et al., 2014). It could be possible that females are more inclined to be soft hearted and sympathetic and may know that other individuals who possess these qualities may not have the highest job performance.

Further analysis of the demographic data suggested that females were significantly more likely to hire individuals who fit the dimension of conscientiousness. There could be several reasons to support why these data were found. Conscientious individuals are sought out as hirable applicants across the working community (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014). This correlation could simply be due to the fact that most employers, regardless of gender, will favor conscientious individuals. Another reason for this correlation could be related to the hypothesis formulated by Zaman and colleagues (2014) which states that even when conscientious individuals start a family, they are more successful in mediating both the role as a family member and an employee.

A third significant correlation was found between who applicants stated they would hire and who they actually hired. Participants were asked to list on a Likert scale if they would hire each applicant. It was found that participants most often listed they were very likely to hire applicant number 5 and when asked which one of the five applicants they are most likely to hire, 25% of participants selected applicant number 5. Applicant number 5 fit the dimension of agreeableness. The high percentage of participants being likely to hire this applicant is supported by previous research which notes that conscientious and agreeable individuals are most often sought as potential employees (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014).

It was found that the applicant that over half (52%) of the participants selected to hire fit the dimension of conscientiousness. This finding supports previous research done in several studies. Many researchers have stated that conscientious individuals are sought as employees due to their organizational and hardworking traits (Funder, 2013).

Lastly researchers were unable to determine if narcissistic individuals would not hire other narcissistic individuals. It was determined that almost none of the participants, only 7%,

would want to hire the applicant who fit the description of a narcissistic individual. While studies

do show that a little bit of narcissism can be a benefit in the business world, most individuals are

not attracted to the idea of hiring a narcissistic individual (International Business Times. 2011).

Limitations

There were some limitations to this study. The leading limitation was the small sample

size. With a larger sample size, more significant data may have been revealed. The reason for

the small sample size was due to the time constraints placed upon the study. Even with the short

time period provided, this study did provide significant data to support the researcher's main

hypothesis. Additional limitations were the uneven ratios of males, females and ethnicities. Had

the researchers had more time to collect data from a wider range of participants, there could have

been changes in the data.

Concluding Remarks

To the best of our knowledge no study has been done to determine if employers will hire

individuals to match their personality types. Results revealed that individuals who fit the

agreeableness or openness dimensions of the Big Five Inventory are significantly more likely to

hire applicants who also fit the agreeable or open dimension.   Researchers also found that the

most desirable personality trait that employers are likely to hire is conscientiousness. This

information supports previous findings by multiple researchers. Lastly, this study was unable to

determine that narcissistic individuals would hire other narcissistic individual but it was

determined that the applicant who fit the description of a narcissistic/neurotic personality type

was the least likely to be hired by almost all of the participants.

Biographical Note:

Brittany Trubenstein graduated from Angelo State University in May of 2015; with a bachelor's degree in Psychology. She is a member of Psychology Club, Psy Chi National Honors Society, Alpha Chi National Honors Society, Phi Kappa Phi National Honors Society and Who's Who Among College Students in American Colleges and Universities. Brittany Trubenstein plans to attend University of California at Riverside where she will pursue her PhD in Psychology.

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