

Finding diversity through blind hiring

By  Auguste Coetzer

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Research supports the contention that greater diversity equals greater business success. Internationally, this has prompted a hunt for hiring tools that foster recruitment based solely on aptitude and competencies. Sometimes, the search is also spurred by pangs of conscience, as evidence mounts that discrimination has contaminated past recruitment practice.



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Advocates of blind hiring believe the application of these techniques will make the hiring process more objective and lessen the effect of unconscious bias. The trend is most evident in the US, though British companies also show interest. It has yet to be extensively explored in South Africa, however.

Process

Blind hiring takes many forms.

The simplest is perhaps the redacting of names on résumés. Redaction is prompted in part by a US study, which proved that applicants with traditional white names were more likely to receive a 'call-back' for a job interview than those with African-American names, though résumés were statistically identical.

Another method is to postpone face-to-face interviews, helping to combat initial-stage gender, age or ethnic bias.

Other companies ask candidates to work on mock projects, perform tasks or take up a challenge – perhaps writing a blog post. Candidates are then judged on content and the skills on view.

In some cases, employer and employee enter web-based chat rooms to talk anonymously. ‘Blind auditioning’ software is also available.

Attendance at top universities or previous work for a glamour company can also skew recruitment. Information like this is liable to be redacted.

Concerns

Some object that projects and challenges get job seekers to work free, while some employers complain that these processes add to recruitment costs and prolong selection.

A major concern is that anonymous focus on skills ignores the cultural fit needed for successful placement. Attitude can be as important as aptitude, especially when cohesive teamwork is demanded.

Pros and cons are still coming in. Some proponents claim top performers have been hired as a direct result of these practices – people who previously would have been ignored. Others complain that if diversity is the goal it can only be assured when you know whom you are hiring.

Some advocate a mix of hiring practices – blind hiring blended with referencing and interviews. As experience grows, we may find blind hiring is sometimes relevant, sometimes not.

Role at junior level

It may have a role in entry-level recruitment where basic skills are important or in technical specialisations, as blind hiring techniques appear to produce better indicators at junior level and specialised skills levels, than at executive level.

The higher up the managerial ladder you go, the greater the need for interaction with the candidate. Employers need to see top talent and judge their reactions to questions and situations. A candidate’s emotional and cultural intelligence is a key issue. If there is a choice between personality and anonymity, organisations will go for personality every time.

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