

Avoiding gender bias in hiring processes

Advertising new posts:

- Wording gender neutral
- Encourage female and minority candidates to apply
- Make public flexible work options, family friendly work hours, resources aimed at better work-life balance

Interviewing applicants:

- Discuss unconscious bias with hiring committee before interviews
- Strive for balanced and diverse interview committee

Selection process:

- Consider time in academia rather than actual age
- Attempt to short list at least one quarter female candidates. Although final selection cannot be reserved for women candidates, shortlisting those candidates allows them greater exposure and evaluation based on criteria that may have been undervalued in the initial paper based application. (Results indicated that personnel decisions of both males and females were significantly more unfavorable when women represented 25% or less of the total pool.)

Tips for reviewing dossiers:

- develop criteria for evaluating candidates and apply them consistently
- educate committee on biases
- review dossiers carefully, not only one element
- recognize personal biases
- be aware of research on biases
- use clear job descriptions
- create transparent procedures/policies
- include individuals with different perspectives on hiring committees
- be able to defend every decision to reject or retain candidate

Collaborative hiring process (diverse set of persons in interview committee) helps against following biases:

- confirmation bias (tendency for people to seek out information that conforms to their preexisting views, and ignore information that goes against their views)
- in-group bias (tendency to favor members of your own group)
- projection bias (thinking that others have same priority, attitude or belief as you do)
- selective perception (process of perceiving what we want to while taking in information, while ignoring stimuli that contradict our beliefs or expectations)
- status quo bias (preference for current state of affairs)

Research shows:

- Women are rated down irrespective of whether they behave in a stereotypically masculine or stereotypically feminine way. These evaluation penalties include being assessed as:
 - less likeable and less agentic than male peers who display the same behavior
 - less competent for work than their male peers who perform at the same level
 - less desirable as leaders, less hireable and less likely to succeed in their careers than men behaving the same way
 - less likeable, less hireable and having less potential to succeed in their careers, regardless of being judged equally competent as men, when both men and women behave in a stereotypically masculine way
 - these negative evaluations of women relative to men are more pronounced in male dominated occupations.
- There is strong bias against women in the form of lower evaluations of characteristics associated with leadership and backlash against them when they display those characteristics (more pronounced when women occupy male stereotypical roles)
- Furthermore, even when women match men in performance, they are rated down on potential and are less likely to be recommended for hiring
- There are unconscious beliefs such as “think leader think male”
- Women are far less likely to apply to job descriptions with masculine-coded language, whereas the likelihood that men would apply to job descriptions with feminine-coded job description was negligibly affected.
(Masculine-coded words: active, adventurous, challenge, confident, decision, driven, independent, lead, objective, opinion)
(Feminine-coded words: agree, commit, cooperate, depend, honest, interpersonal, loyal, support)
- Unconscious stereotypes of gender affect the evaluation of a person’s performance. For example, both men and women give lower ratings to works of art, written articles, or curriculum vitae when they believe they are evaluating the work of a woman.
- In addition, an analysis of peer review scores of applications for postdoctoral positions (in Sweden, named by the United Nations as the leading country in the world for equality of opportunities for women and men) revealed that **women applicants had to be 2.5 times as productive as the average man to receive the same score.**
- The same study also revealed that the only other factor as powerful as gender in influencing an applicant’s score is an affiliation with one of the committee members – indicating the power of nepotism in the selection process as well. To circumvent these effects, universities should consider making the review of applicant’s credentials ‘gender-blind’.

Reference:

- University of Zurich UZH Career & Gender Factsheet:
http://www.gcb.uzh.ch/services/CareerGender/Career_Gender_Equality_Hiring_Processes.pdf
and references therein

