

HOW HEURISTIC HIRING PRACTICES LEAD TO NONOPTIMAL OUTCOMES: THE CASE OF OBESE WORKERS

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Hiring is one of the key tasks for a company. In a competitive market, productive workers are decisive for the survival of the company. They invest a considerable amount of time and money to find a candidate that fits to its profile. While hiring costs are low for unskilled workers, they can increase up to 24 weeks of wage payments for highly skilled workers (Kramarz & Michaud, 2010; Blatter et al., 2012; respectively). But hiring is not only a crucial part for companies, it is also of increasing interest to researchers. For 2019 alone, google.scholar search results show more than 25,000 papers with the word “hiring” in its title.

Various candidates do not receive a job offer, however, because of some characteristic that is unrelated to the position. For example, Crow et al. (1995) show that black, male homosexuals are the least likely to be hired. Various authors confirm that minorities suffer from discrimination in diverse settings. Blacks applying in the teacher labor market (D'amico et al., 2017), foreigners when trying to socially integrate (Nessler et al., 2019), or applicants with stigmatized illnesses (Brokerhof & Füssenich, 2020).

Apart from belonging to a minority, other performance unrelated attributes also influence a company's hiring decision. For example, Baert and Decuyper (2014) show that attractive applicants are more likely to receive a job offer. A result that several other authors confirmed (Shahani-Denning, 2003), however, the effect differs between occupations (Paustian-Underdahl & Slattery Walker, 2015). Researcher recognized another physical attribute that has an influence on the hiring decision; obesity. Being obese, viz., having an excessive fat accumulation that prevents a risk to health, is a disadvantage when looking for a job. Several studies show that obese applicants are less likely to receive a job offer (Campos-Vazquez & Gonzalez, 2020).

A recruiter might (un)consciously expect obese applicants to perform worse because of their physical condition. Such a bias might still exist even when the candidate applies for a job that involves no or only minimal physical activity, e.g., in technological areas. The determining factor for a company to hire someone, however, should be performance. But what if recruiters suffer from heuristics that lead them to a wrong assessment of the candidate? Apart, from health- (Ng, et al., 2014) and sports related (Prinz & Wicker, 2012) papers, researchers have neglected to examine if obese workers perform differently compared to non-obese workers. This research gap occurred

mostly because of unavailability of data on individual performance. Moreover, most studies on obesity among adults are based on self-reported data which can be biased.

In this paper, we examine if obese workers perform worse. Specifically, we analyze if increasing obesity results in decreasing performance. For this we use competitive video gaming (Esports) as an example. Using this data has three advantages. First, we are able to track performance. This is an advantage because it is often exceedingly difficult to evaluate the performance of workers. Clear benchmarks that make a sensible comparison possible are rarely available. This is different for online computer games. They have clear performance metrics that are implicitly accepted by everyone who participates. Second, professional Esports players have public profiles with a personal photo. Thus, we have a good metric for body mass index (BMI), i.e., the measure regarding obesity. Getting reliable information for worker's body mass is not only an ethical problem for researchers but often impossible because of data availability. Third, the data is similar to a natural experiment. Workers often have to repeat both simple and more difficult similar tasks over and over again. It is, however, difficult to recreate this process in a comprehensible way. In a lab experiment it would be reasonable to assume that test subjects would suffer from a Hawthorne effect when they would have to repeat the same task again and again. The advantage of this data is that players are repeating the same task again and again. We do not have to fear that any confounders influence their behaviour. Moreover, professional gaming is close to other contemporary jobs with high computer skills requirements and low levels of physical activity.

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