

Background-blind recruitment opens new opportunity for jobseekers

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By Kim Pan-suk, Minister of Personnel Management

Professors Marianne Bertrand of the University of Chicago and Sendhil Mullainathan of MIT conducted a survey on the potential discrimination that may occur during the recruitment process.

The two professors sent out the same resumes to many job posts, using a name frequently used by African-Americans for half of the resumes and a name widely used by white Americans for the other half.

The results showed white names receive 50 percent more callbacks for interviews. Callbacks are also more responsive to resume quality for white-sounding names than for African-American ones. This result clearly demonstrates how name-background information that can cause prejudice has an impact on one's judgment.

In order to acquire talented and capable human resources, a public agency or a private company needs to evaluate an individual's ability to carry out a task without knowing their background information such as the name of their university or school, region of birth or the applicant's photo.

This method of recruitment is called background-blind recruitment. The former Civil Service Commission, which is now the Ministry of Personnel Management, removed education background information from the application form for the open recruitment of government officials in 2005 and introduced the method of having a "Behavioral Event Interview" for the first time.

This is a way to assess an individual's ability to undertake a task by reviewing the interviewee's behaviors in the course of solving a task. The introduction of a "background-blind recruitment system" led to the adoption of "structured interviews," where interviewees are asked pre-determined questions and are evaluated through a specific method and standard in order to ensure the validity and reliability of each interview.

In these interviews, interviewers ask job-specific questions or give a policy-driven task for the interviewee to accomplish with the purpose of assessing the overall abilities of the interviewee without knowing any of their background information.

The interview is also an important element in the recruitment of government officials. The purpose of interviews is not to assess the level of eloquence of a person, but to evaluate the person's capacity to carry out tasks such as critical thinking skills, ability to analyze a situation, communication skills and so forth.

Various methods such as group discussions, individual presentations, experiential interviews and situational interviews are utilized. Evaluation is not completed with one question: several follow-up questions are asked based on how the interview situation unfolds, naturally revealing the interviewee's ability to deal with spontaneous or complex situations.

In open recruitment for Grade-5 government officials, six interviewers interview and evaluate one interviewee for four hours. Under these circumstances, it is close to impossible to fool well-trained and experienced interviewers just with good speaking skills.



There is a misconception that blind recruitments will keep the interviewer in the “dark,” but this is far from true. Rather, background-blind recruitment is a way to keep everyone in the “light” by assessing an individual’s critical ability to take on a given task using a verified and reliable method without being swayed by background information that may only cause prejudice and nothing more.

Having this in mind, the Korean government is planning to develop an Interviewer Training Program at the National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI) in an effort to expand the pool of expert interviewers.

The Canadian government has recently introduced a “name-blind recruitment” as a trial for recruiting government officials as part of its efforts to hire talented personnel in various areas without being prejudiced by one’s name to provide high-quality public service.

Lately, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is casting numerous challenges on our societies. The importance of creativity and convergence is growing evermore and efforts to find competent human resources for each sector of society are getting more competitive than ever in an “era of war for talent.”

Utilizing the background-blind recruitment method focusing on a person’s job competency without factoring in background information will provide a new window of opportunity to the young generation who are longing for equal opportunity, fair process and just results.