

ABSTRACT

The Phenomenon Of Interpersonal Chemistry In The Hiring Process: Toward The Development Of A Theory

Purpose

Hiring is often portrayed as a rational and objective process based on tangible job qualifications. However, hiring decisions are also made based on another important criteria, known as interpersonal “chemistry” among executive recruiters, hiring authorities, career advisers, and candidates—the targeted informant groups in this study. Although chemistry is a widely recognized and used term in the practical community, its impact on the hiring process had not been pursued through prior research, and a better understanding within an organizational as well as a broader cultural context was sought.

Methods and Procedures

A qualitative frame was the most adequate for this study because little information existed on the topic, variables were unknown, meanings consisted of tacitly held cultural knowledge in the minds of informants, and context was very important. A case study approach was used because it allowed the incorporation of several data sources--such as cultural artifacts--in addition to in-depth interviews with fifty informants. These interviews were conducted either in-person or by telephone over a five month period; and sampling was on a nationwide basis.

Results

Results of the study reveal that as an abstract construct used by informants, the interpersonal interaction they call chemistry often has an enormous impact on both candidates and prospective employers in hiring decisions. Chemistry is complex and subject to a variety of personal characteristics and behaviors within a sociocultural context; moreover, hiring choices involving chemistry are subject to idiosyncratic personal perceptions with both positive and negative effects. However, a new theory is offered to explain what informants call chemistry as a process which consists of identifiable bonding elements and events that serve to attract or repel individuals in hiring situations.

Conclusions

The overarching conclusion is that chemistry--at least where it has been studied here--even serves to redefine so-called tangible job qualifications as intangibles, and is the deciding factor in hiring decisions. Thus, conclusions drawn from this study suggest numerous implications, for both researchers and those with concerns in the practical world: candidates, hiring authorities, and intermediaries in hiring processes.

Specifications

Seven chapters and appendixes, including an extensive bibliography of 927 references acquired for review by the researcher from a compiled computer database of 1299 listings and abstracts. Total volume, 469 pages.