Relationship between Critical Thinking and the Halo Effect

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During the process of recruiting suitable job candidates for a corporation, HR managers play a pivotal role. However, several factors influence HR managers when making these crucial hiring decisions. One such factor is the halo effect. However, the halo effect can be reduced through deliberate and systematic cognitive processing.

Keywords: halo effect; critical thinking; negative perfectionism; human resources; compensation

1. Introduction

Several factors influence HR managers when making these crucial hiring decisions. One such factor that significantly impacts HR managers during recruitment is the halo effect. HR managers are responsible for selecting talents, and their effectiveness in this role relies on their ability to identify strengths in individuals and prevent biases influenced by the halo effect. The halo effect, as a cognitive bias, strongly influences HR managers’ talent selection processes [12]. Within corporate recruitment activities, interviews remain the preferred method for personnel selection among HR managers [4]. Factors such as candidates’ level of education, the prestige of the institution(s) they attended, appearance, eloquence, and versatility are often seen as indicators of ability and competency [5]. Careful recruitment is essential to mitigate adverse workplace conditions and reduce employee turnover [6]. The halo effect leads HR managers to over-extrapolate and make inaccurate overall assessments based on specific areas where candidates excel. Therefore, it is crucial to address the influence of the halo effect among HR managers during recruitment.

2. Halo Effect

The halo effect is a phenomenon in which individuals tend to form an overall impression of others based on positive or negative partial impressions. This bias was discovered by Thorndike in 1920 [7], and the study conducted by Dion et al. [8] is widely recognized as a classic contribution to this field. Their research revealed that people have a tendency to overestimate the characteristics and abilities of individuals who they perceive to be more attractive in terms of physical appearance. The halo effect manifests itself in various domains, including in education and judicial practices, wherein biases may influence jury judgments based on the attractiveness of criminal suspects [9] or teachers may form an opinion on a student's intelligence based on their appearance [10]. The emergence of the halo effect is linked to the cognitive mechanism of humans, as impressions of others are formed through a combination of automatic and constructive processes. These processes connect partial characteristics to create a generalized and holistic perception [11]. However, the halo effect can be reduced through deliberate and systematic cognitive processing. When individuals perceive things quickly, randomly, and spontaneously, the halo effect can occur. Conversely, when individuals engage in thoughtful and thorough thinking and judgement, the halo effect diminishes [12].

3. Critical Thinking and the Halo Effect

Critical Thinking is a form of reflective thinking that plays a vital role in decision-making processes [13]. Its origin can be traced back to Socrates in ancient Greece, and later, Dewey referred to it as “reflective thinking.” Reflective thinking involves actively and carefully examining one’s beliefs and assumptions, gaining insight into the reasons supporting them and the conclusions they lead to. In the field of psychology, early scholars viewed critical thinking as a cognitive skill that involved information extraction, reasoning, and deduction [14]. Over time, researchers have expanded the concept to include belief, thinking mode, and mental tendencies [15]. Recent research has focused on measuring critical thinking. For example, Halpern [16] measured critical thinking based on the ability to analyze, integrate, and evaluate information, as well as the tendency to use these abilities. Byrnes and Dunbar [17] proposed a three-component model of critical thinking, suggesting that critical thinking could be measured from three aspects: critical analytic ability, which involves
Previous studies have shown that individuals who possess strong critical thinking skills prioritize evidence when making decisions. Such individuals recognize their cognitive limitations and avoid basing decisions solely on personal preferences in the absence of sufficient evidence. Furthermore, they demonstrate respect for diverse perspectives and ideas and strive to learn from them. However, individuals who lack critical thinking skills tend to make decisions based on subjective judgment, disregard the opinions of others, and focus solely on evidence that supports their own views. These individuals also tend to draw one-sided conclusions, lack empathy, and fail to consider alternative perspectives, leading to the halo effect. Facione’s self-regulation theory highlights the important role of critical thinking in correcting misconceptions and quickly identifying underlying issues to reduce decision-making errors. By avoiding cognitive simplifications, critical thinkers can overcome the halo effect.

4. The Mediating Role of Negative Perfectionism

Perfectionism is an irrational belief that reflects an individual’s cognitive tendency to interpret events and evaluate themselves and others. People with this belief strive for omnipotence and deny their limitations and imperfections. For HR managers, perfectionism can have both positive and negative effects. Perfectionists usually demonstrate high personal standards, a strong work ethic and a strong sense of morality. However, perfectionists’ high expectations of others often result in harsh evaluations of others’ performance. Moreover, they are prone to forming stereotypes and experiencing the halo effect, as well as negative emotions such as anxiety. To address these contradictions, Slade and Owens proposed a dual process model, which divided perfectionism into positive perfectionism and negative perfectionism. Positive perfectionists uphold high personal standards without excessively worrying about making mistakes. They are often associated with positive psychological variables such as active coping, high self-esteem, achievement, and conscientiousness. On the other hand, negative perfectionism, is characterized by an excessive fear of making mistakes, self-doubt, and the belief that personal standards cannot be achieved. They tend to make negative judgments when evaluating the ideas of others and pay too much attention to detail. They also tend to filter information and judge others based on specific traits. When HR Managers with negative perfectionism focus on specific traits, they are prone to subjective prejudice and may become caught in a cycle of compulsive thinking and self-argument.

Critical thinking, as a cognitive skill, enables individuals to analyze the source and the validity of information and set reasonable goals. It effectively mitigates the negative effects of perfectionism by helping individuals avoid unrealistically high standards for themselves. When evaluating others, critical thinking can help negative perfectionists adopt a problem-oriented thinking mode, thereby reducing cognitive biases caused by negative perfectionism and the halo effect.

5. The Moderating Role of Compensation Level

In corporate management, an individual’s compensation serves as both an outcome variable of their performance and an antecedent variable of many job-related psychological behaviors. Compensation level, typically measured by monthly income, is closely related to job performance, job satisfaction, turnover intention, and creativity as antecedent variables. Employees’ perception of pay equality and feeling of being underpaid in comparison to others directly impact on their work psychology. Moreover, the compensation level of HR managers influences their decision-making, judgment, and behavior during recruitment. According to the resource scarcity theory, a low compensation level often generates a sense of scarcity, leading individuals to focus on maximizing the benefits from their resources and delivering quick results. Compared to other departments, HR managers typically have lower compensation levels, which can induce a sense of scarcity and affect their decision-making and judgment. Psychologists have found that a lack of money can create a scarcity mindset, diverting limited cognitive resources towards scarce objects and having long-term impacts on cognition and behavior. During recruitment, HR managers are tasked with finding the best candidates, which can activate the cognitive model of negative perfectionism, depleting cognitive resources and intensifying attentional focus, ultimately resulting in the halo effect. In other words, the low compensation level of HR managers can amplify the impact of negative perfectionism in inducing the halo effect.
References


