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Deciding on promotions and redundancies

Promoting people by ability, experience, gender and motivation

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Abstract

Purpose – To examine how people weigh information when making people decisions, specifically promotion or redundancy, at work.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 183 working adults completed two questionnaires that required them to rate 16 vignettes describing hypothetical people. They were devised to give combinations of the following: two gender (male/female), two levels of ability (average/high), two levels of work experience (less than five years/ more than 15 years) and two levels of motivation (average/high). The first questionnaire required participants to rate the 16 people for possible promotion and the second for possible redundancy

Findings – Participants favoured males over females; the more over the less experienced; the more over the less able/intelligence and the more over the less motivated for promotion and to be retained rather than made redundant. Employee motivation was seen to be the most important individual difference variable in the decision making.

Practical implications – Managers have to make many people decisions such as who to promote. They usually have to balance and weigh different pieces of information about people regarding that decision. This study shows that three factors were rated as particularly important namely experience, intelligence and motivation.

Originality/value – This study appears to be the first to examine decision making through this traditional vignette methodology. While it has drawbacks it also has advantages to investigate how people weigh information about others when trying to make important people decisions.

Keywords Experience, Gender, Motivation (psychology), Promotion, Redundancy

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

One of the occasional tasks of a manager is to decide on who in their reporting staff to promote as well as, where applicable, who to make redundant. In large organisations there may be guidelines concerning which factors both to take into consideration (i.e. experience/service) and/or what to ignore (e.g. gender). Further some organisations keep records on performance which are designed to reduce the subjectivity in these sorts of decisions (Shipper and Davy, 2002). Nevertheless this is always a difficult decision because of the many and powerful consequences not only for the individual involved, but also his/her working colleagues and the organisation as a whole.

Making promotion and redundancy decisions nearly always involves taking different factors into account such as an employees ability, motivation and experience. This study focuses on four such factors: an employees gender; their ability (intelligence/skill); their motivation (hard-work, conscientiousness) and their length of service or experience in the job. While there is a vast literature on job selection there is very little on decision making concerning specifically promotions and redundancies. This study uses vignettes of hypothetical people to study decision making of this kind which has been used frequently (London and Stumpt, 1982; Sessa and Taylor, 2000).

There are a number of theoretically overlapping areas with respect to this study. One is the extensive literature on organisational justice, which itself encompasses various specific theories like equity theory, procedural justice theory, justice judgement theory and allocation preference theory (Greenberg, 1996). While the research on distributive justice is less relevant to this study, that on procedural justice certainly is. Greenberg (1996) has noted that judgements of procedural justice at work are strongly influenced by two factors: the interpersonal treatment people receive from decision makers (i.e. honesty, courtesy, timely feedback, respect for rights) as well as an adequate explanation of decisions. It appears that there are different criteria affecting the perceived fairness of treatment including evidence that decision makers adequately considered others' viewpoints; they attempted to suppress personal bias; they were consistent in applying criteria; they gave timely feedback about their decisions and that they explained the basis for decisions. In short decisions need to be adequately reasoned and sincerely communicated.

Selection and redundancy decision have an impact not only the person making the decision and on the person who is the subject of the decision making but all employees in an organisation. They have expectations of how these decisions are made because they no doubt can and will effect how they are treated in due course. Selection, promotion and redundancy decisions represent clear examples of organisational justice at work. In some organisations there are clear guidelines about how procedures should be adhered to, whereas in others much more idiosyncratic factors are at work including the personality, experiences and ethical values of the decision maker.

They noted that the results suggested that:

1. Job irrelevant variables often are used in managerial selection decisions and may be more important than job-relevant variables.
2. Managerial selection decision models are complex and involve configural cue processing.
3. Managers' personal demographics may be the most important variables in starting salary recommendations for managers (and possibly other professionals).
4. Significant effects were found for applicant sex in starting salary recommendations after controlling for human capital variables.

These results, is substantiated by further research, have important implications for the processes and outcomes of decisions regarding selecting professionals and their initial salary determinations (Greenberg, 1996, p. 60).

There is a significant research literature concerning how best to classify managerial traits and skills (Yau and Sculli, 1990). Over the past decade particularly in applied and human resource circles it has become popular to talk about management competencies (Boyatzis, 1982; Dulewicz and Herbert, 1999), a concept first made popular by

McClelland (1973). There are however serious conceptual problems with the concept of competency which has led many to reject it in favour of more traditional and distinct concepts like ability and personality (Furnham, 2001; Moloney, 1997).

There is also a salient literature on the characteristics people look for when selecting others to work with, and for, them (Furnham, 2002). However, the most relevant and salient literature for this study concerns the perceived fairness/equity in promotion practices. McEnrue (1989, p. 816) noted that "researchers have never looked at promotion practices" and that semi-relevant research that has been done has been "from the perspective of the decision maker". In her studies she demonstrated that procedural and distributive justice factors had a powerful influence on the perceived justice of promotions. More recently Bajdo and Dickson (2001) showed that both national and organisational culture variables effected how, when and why females were promoted. There is also a great deal of work on related issues like the psychological contract and the new shape of careers in the twenty-first century (Furnham, 2005).

As well as gender, studies have considered how decisions makers take race into consideration when deciding on promotions (Harrison *et al.*, 1998). Powell and Butterfield (2002) proposed a promotion decision-making theory which made two central assumptions. First, individuals base their decisions on one or more pieces of information or cues. Second, individuals combine these cues in some manner to reach their decisions. The cues relevant to this study include personal characteristics of applicants "qualifications such as their education, work experience and current level in the organisational hierarchy" (Powell and Butterfield, 2002, pp. 399-400). Their study focused on gender and race but they did find years at the highest grade, highest degree obtained and performance appraisal did not effect selection decisions. However, they did record that:

> It should be noted that other subjective or objective measures of applicants' credentials (e.g. job-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, or experiences they had) that were not assessed may have influences promotion decision outcomes (Powell and Butterfield, 2002, p. 422).

Kacmar *et al.* (1994) asked students from difference race groups in America to view four video tapes of a white female, white male, black female and black male who were supposedly applying for a job. They tested the assumption that giving participants job-relevant information has a positive effect on minority candidates. They found that having job-relevant information prior to an interview did improve the ratings for Black (minority) applicants but that these did not translate into more hire decisions. Their results concur with those of Hitt *et al.* (1982) who found Black females significantly more responses to resumes sent to *Fortune* 500 firms, but that they did not have a higher probability of actually being hired.

In a similar earlier study Hitt and Barr (1989) asked participants to view 16 applicants who differed in age, sex, race, job experience, education and level of job for which they were applying. They found that job-irrelevant variables were used heavily in selection decisions and that their decision models were complex. Blacks were rated lower than whites, women lower than men but there was no evidence of age discrimination. They found managers differentiate between applicants with complex but precise cognitive models based on prototypes. Thus a Black, 45 year old female

with ten years of salient experience and a master's degree is viewed quite differently from a white, 35 year old man with identical experience and education.

In a retrospective, path-analytic study focusing on gender differences in managerial advancement Tharenon *et al.* (1994) found, predictably, that training led to managerial advancement and that this particularly favoured men. It was also more advantageous for men rather than women to have greater work experience and education. The path co-efficient for men showed that training and development was the best predictor of managerial advancement and that three factors that predicted it were work experience, education and self-confidence. However, this study was not on decision making but the actual pathways to managerial success.

This study is concerned with the weighting people use in making difficult managerial decisions. It is based on a methodology used to examine the decision to allocate scarce medical resources across medical conditions, using effect sizes primarily as the outcome criteria. Furnham, Thomson and McClelland (2002) examined how participants used data on hypothetical patients age, income, childlessness and smoking habits to rank order them for three types of operations: kidney dialysis, IVF and organ transplants. This involves rank-ordering individuals who differ systematically on a number of variables often set up in a factorial design. In this study participants were given two questionnaires that described 16 hypothetical employees (see Table I for how it was done in this study). As in the various medical studies the interest was focused on the relative influence of the four factors (Furnham, Hassomal and McClelland, 2002).

In this study four individual difference factors will be considered in two semi-identical studies. The first is sex. Because of both increasing sensitivity to gender discrimination but also the relative power of the other individual difference variance it is predicted that sex will not have a significant main effect for either decisions about promotions (*H1a*) or redundancies (*H1b*). The second factor was work experience as measured by years of service with the company. It was predicted that this factor would be highly significant in both causes with those with more experience/service (>15 yrs) being more likely to be chosen for promotion (*H2a*) and less likely to be chosen for redundancy (*H2b*). The third factor was ability/intelligence and it was predicted that this would be important for both promotion and redundancy decisions. It was predicted that the more able would be selected over the less able for promotion (*H3a*) but the other way around for redundancy (*H3b*). The final and probably most important factor was motivation/conscientiousness. It was predicted the more motivated would, compared to the less motivated, be chosen for promotion (*H4a*) but the other way around for redundancy (*H4b*).

With regard to effect sizes for main effects was concerned it was predicted that in both decision categories (promotion, redundancy) the rank order for the four factors would be motivation, then ability, then experience, then gender (*H5*). No formal hypotheses for interactions were made.

Method

Participants

A total of 183 individuals participated in the study, of whom 75 were male and 106 female (two unreported). The mean age for the sample was 36.89 years (SD = 13.92

Candidates		Redundancy		Promotion	
		X	SD	*X*	SD
1.	John who has been 17 years with the company, of average intelligence, ability and skill; who is very hard working and motivated	4.89	1.46	4.69	1.24
2.	Sarah, with very high ability and intelligence; an employee for three years; and who is average with respect to motivation and hard work	2.86	1.17	2.78	0.99
3.	Philip, who is very driven, hard-working and motivated, who has been 19 years with you, of average abilities, skills and intelligence	4.24	1.47	4.45	1.20
4.	Anne, who has worked $4\frac{1}{2}$ years with the company; who has exceptional abilities and skills, and who is very average in motivation, drive and hard work	2.68	1.31	3.25	1.07
5.	David, who has been with you 15 years, of normal average ability and skill; and with tremendous motivation and capacity for hard work	3.18	1.58	2.35	1.09
6.	Louise, of average drive and motivation, an employee for exactly two years and with very high ability, intelligence and skill	2.48	1.21	2.34	1.01
7.	Peter, who is very driven, hard working and self-motivated, who has been working with you for 16 years and has pretty average skills, ability and intellect	3.12	1.27	2.98	0.94
8.	Alison, a relative newcomer, who has been 18 months with you, has exceptional ability, intelligence and skills, and who is average in her drive and motivation	4.35	1.32	4.07	1.10
9.	Christopher, one of your most long-serving employees of 40 years with strictly average skills, intelligence and ability; and with tremendous drive, motivation and capacity for hard work	3.35	1.52	3.29	1.50
10.	Joan, who has worked at the company five years, has very high intelligence, ability and skills, and who has average drive, motivation and hard-work practice	4.84	1.59	4.87	1.35
11.	Henry, of average skills at the job, ability and intelligence, who has very high motivation, tendency to hard work and drive, who has been in service here 18 years	5.88	1.42	6.07	1.15
12.	Julia, who has been employed for three years; who has very high skill, ability and intelligence and who is clearly average in capacity for hard work and skill motivation	5.94	1.59	6.14	1.23
13.	Adrian, with average intelligence, job skills, ability, who has worked 19 years for your company, and is very motivated, driven and hard working	5.47	1.45	4.66	1.22
14.	Susan, who has been with you just under three years; has very high skills, ability and intelligence; and also of average drive, capacity for hard work and motivation	4.82	1.51	4.12	1.10

(*continued*)

Table I.
Mean scores (with SDs) for ratings on a seven-point scale from very low priority to 7 absolutely crucial to either make redundant or promote

Candidates		Redundancy *X*	Redundancy SD	Promotion *X*	Promotion SD
15.	William, an employee of exactly 16 years; with great motivation and drive and with average ability, intelligence and skill	3.05	1.33	3.16	1.08
16.	Gillian, of average motivational status, capacity for drive and tendency to be hard-working, who has been working for your company for just under five years who has high ability, intelligence and skill	2.26	1.30	1.90	0.93

Notes: 1 = Very Low; 7 = Absolutely crucial. The names of the individuals were different in the two questionnaires. Common, familiar, first names that traditionally were given either only to males and females were used. Pilot work ensured all participants immediately know the gender of the target person

Table I.

years). The majority of participants did not have a university degree (77.6 per cent). The sample was inclusive with respect to marital status, with 35.3 per cent of participants being single, 38.3 per cent married, 14.5 per cent cohabiting, 7.5 per cent divorced and 3 per cent widowed. All were working and had either managerial or supervisory experiences; that if they were in positions of authority that involved making serious decisions about others such as promotions.

Questionnaire

Participants completed a three part questionnaire. In the first part (deciding on redundancies) they were given a grid that described 16 people (see Table I). Their instructions were as follows:

> We want you to imagine that you own and run a successful company that employs around 120 people. The current economic situation has caused a major crisis and you have no other option than to make staff redundant. Following your instructions your HR director has drawn up a list of 16 people she wants you to rate for how important it is to keep them.
>
> You are asked to rate each one according to how much they need to be retained. Read each one and then indicate the priority to keeping them. The lower the score (i.e. 1 Very Low, or 2 Low) the more you feel they are good candidates for possible redundancy, while the higher the score (6 Extremely High, 7 Absolutely Crucial to keep) the less you feel they should be considered for redundancy.

The second part was a mirror of the first except participants were asked to decide on promoting rather than making employees redundant. The instructions for the other questionnaire were:

> Deciding on promotions – We want you to imagine that you own and run a successful company that employs around 120 people. Every so often people apply for promotion and it is your final decision who gets promotion. Following your instruction your HR director has drawn up a list of 16 people she wants you to rate for promotion to a middle management position. You are asked to rate each one. Read each of the very brief descriptions of each one and then indicate the extent to which you believe they deserve promotion. The higher your score the higher your priority rating of promoting that person.

The two questionnaires were part of a larger booklet of inventories and separated by four others. Participants were told not to "turn back" when completing the

questionnaire. The third part of the questionnaire asked participants to complete personal details.

Procedure. A London-based market research company was asked to obtain 200 British managerial level adults of working age. They were inevitably therefore not a random sample s all had to be both at work and in positions of leadership. They were tested throughout the country and offered a small incentive to complete the questionnaires. Questionnaires were delivered on one day and collected on the next and remained anonymous. In all 190 of these collected were usable in the research (95.0 per cent response rate).

Results

Promotions

The analysis of variance had both main effects for the four person factors and interactions. These will be discussed separately.

Main effects. The data were analysed through a two (gender) by two (high versus low experience) by two (high versus low intelligence) by two (high versus low motivation) repeated measures ANOVA. Table I presents the main effects, interactions and corresponding effect sizes, which indicate the amount of variance explained by each factor. Participants favoured males ($M = 3.88$, $SE = 0.04$) over females ($M = 3.78$, $SE = 0.04$), the more experienced ($M = 4.39$, $SE = 0.04$) over the less experienced ($M = 3.27$, $SE = 0.05$), the more able/intelligent ($M = 4.56$, $SE = 0.04$) over the less able/intelligent ($M = 3.10$, $SE = 0.05$) and the motivated ($M = 4.59$, $SE = 0.05$) over the less motivated employees ($M = 3.07$, $SE = 0.04$).

Interactions. There were a number of statistically significant interactions (see Table II) all of which were ordinal. For "gender by experience", simple main effects analysis indicated that more experienced employees were preferred for promotion across genders, however, the effect has somewhat stronger for females than for males (eta $sq._{males} = 0.569$, eta $sq._{fem} = 0.659$). For "gender by intelligence", simple main effects analysis revealed that while the highly intelligent were preferred across

Source	df	*F*	Effect size
Gender (G)	1,177	11.38*	0.06
Experience (E)		348.03*	0.66
Intelligence (I)		552.77*	0.76
Motivation (M)		641.45*	0.78
G × E	2,176	17.80*	0.09
G × I		8.54*	0.25
E × I		131.24*	0.43
G × M		28.02*	0.14
E × M		21.11*	0.11
I × M		1.14*	0.00
G × E × I	3,175	43.93*	0.19
G × E × M		2.29*	0.01
G × I × M		0.54*	0.00
E × I × M		18.25*	0.09
G × E × I × M	4,174	20.22*	0.10

Note: $* p < 0.001$

Table II.
Results of repeated measures ANOVA for promotions

genders, the effect was somewhat stronger for males than for females (eta $sq._{males} = 0.742$, eta $sq._{fem} = 0.646$). For "gender by motivation", simple main effects analysis indicated that the highly motivated were preferred across genders, but the effect was somewhat stronger for females (eta $sq._{males} = 0.668$, eta $sq._{fem} = 0.809$). For "experience by intelligence", simple main effects analysis indicated that while highly intelligent employees were consistently favoured, the effect was somewhat stronger for the more experienced (eta $sq._{exp} = 0.763$, eta $sq._{inexp.} = 0.647$). Last, for "experience by motivation", simple main effects analysis showed that the highly motivated were consistently preferred, although the effect was somewhat stronger for the more experienced employees (eta $sq._{exp} = 0.745$, eta $sq._{inexp.} = 0.641$). Overall, the interactions did not modify the substantive interpretation of the main effects.

Redundancies

Main effects. A similar ANOVA was set up to analyse the redundancy ratings (see Table III). Table II shows the main effects, interactions and corresponding effect sizes for this analysis. Data were coded such that higher scores indicate lower priority for making someone redundant. In contrast to the findings on promotions, gender did not reach significance levels in this analysis. The other three main effects were all statistically significant. Participants prioritised for redundancy the inexperienced ($M = 3.33$, $SE = 0.06$) over the experienced ($M = 4.61$, $SE = 0.07$), the less intelligent ($M = 3.39$, $SE = 0.06$) over the more intelligent ($M = 4.54$, $SE = 0.06$), and less motivated ($M = 3.21$, $SE = 0.05$) over the motivated ($M = 4.73$, $SE = 0.08$).

Interactions. In this analysis too, all significant interactions were ordinal. For "gender by experience", simple main effects analysis revealed that less experienced employees were prioritised for redundancy across genders, however, the effect was slightly stronger for females than for males (eta $sq._{males} = 0.465$, eta $sq._{fem} = 0.502$). For "gender by intelligence", simple main effects analysis showed that the less intelligent were prioritised for redundancy across genders, however, the effect was

Source	df	*F*	Effect size
Gender (G)	1,175	0.87	0.00
Experience (E)		204.16*	0.54
Intelligence (I)		209.00*	0.54
Motivation (M)		306.73*	0.64
G × E	2,174	6.83*	0.04
G × I		29.45*	0.14
E × I		8.34*	0.04
G × M		2.28*	0.01
E × M		34.44*	0.16
I × M		4.61*	0.03
G × E × I	3,173	6.64*	0.04
G × E × M		9.76*	0.05
G × I × M		10.60*	0.06
E × I × M		46.80*	0.21
G × E × I × M		7.34*	0.04

Note: * $p < 0.001$

Table III.
Results of repeated measures ANOVA for redundancies

much stronger for males than for females (eta $sq._{males} = 0.602$, eta $sq._{fem} = 0.323$). For "experience by intelligence", simple main effects analysis revealed that while the less intelligent were consistently prioritised for redundancy, the effects was somewhat stronger for less experienced employees (eta $sq._{exp} = 0.425$, eta $sq._{inexp.} = 0.535$). For "experience by motivation," simple main effects analysis showed that while the less motivated were consistently prioritised for redundancy, the effect was somewhat stronger for the more experienced employees (eta $sq._{exp} = 0.596$, eta $sq._{inexp.} = 0.497$). Last, for "intelligence by motivation", simple main effects analysis showed that while the less motivated were consistently prioritised for redundancy, the effect was somewhat stronger for more intelligent employees (eta $sq._{high\,IQ} = 0.594$, eta $sq._{low\,IQ.} = 0.527$). As was the case with the promotion ratings, the interactions did not modify the substantive interpretation of the main effects.

Discussion

Many managers at all levels frequently but privately express difficulty in making both promotion and redundancy decisions: both because it involved hard choices with considerable disappointment expressed by those experiencing the less favourable options. Naturally they also complain that redundancy decisions are much harder than promotional decisions for obvious reasons. They know that their decisions have an impact on the particular individual concerned but also his/her workgroup who often try to understand the reasons behind the decision and whether they concur with organisational policy and their perceptions of procedural justice. The concept of fair is central to the issues around organisational justice and the psychological contract. However how managers combine and weight information as they come up with a final decision is not always clear to themselves, the candidate and the general workgroup (Hitt and Barr, 1989).

It is apparent from Table I that respondents made clear distinctions between the 16 candidates and that the preferences were similar in both exercises. Indeed the rank order correlation between the two exercises was $r = 0.94$. The major discrepancy lay between candidates 4 and 5 where the "trade-off" was between ability and motivation. For redundancy, ability seemed more important than motivation, while for promotion the opposite was true.

Most, but not all of the hypotheses were confirmed. Interestingly *H1a* was not confirmed while *H1b* was confirmed. That is, despite legislation to the contrary, there was gender discrimination in choice of candidates for promotion (but not redundancy) with males more likely to be chosen. Interesting where previous studies have been shown significant gender effects, and most have not, there has consistently been a bias towards favouring males (Hitt and Barr, 1989). Further the gender interactions were also significant showing that respondents were clearly making decisions on the basis of gender as well as experience, intelligence and motivation. The gender × experience and gender × motivation significant interactions showed females being favoured over males but the opposite was true for gender × ability/intelligence. Interestingly, the second highest effect size in the two way interactions for promotions was the gender × intelligence interaction which showed a male advantage. Nearly all the studies in this area have shown that people try to combine and weight information so it is not unexpected that interactions have big effect sizes. Thus it appears that when it comes

to promotion, males particularly those thought to be bright were favoured over females.

With regard to redundancy decisions, the main effect for gender was not significant. However, the gender × intelligence interaction (with the second biggest effect size) in the two-way interactions showed a sex effect such that less intelligent males were more likely to be made redundant than less intelligent females.

The second set of hypotheses (*H2a*; *H2b*) regarding work experience were confirmed, both in main effects and interactions. As expected the more experienced were preferred for promotion and being retained (rather than being made redundant) over the less experienced. Three observations are important here. First as a main effect experience was less important than ability/intelligence or motivation, particularly the latter. Next in the interactions experience together with ability/intelligence seemed particularly important from a promotions perspective but little experience with poor motivation seemed particularly important from a redundancy point of view. Third, the way experience was operationalised in this study was years of service which is easy to measure. Experience of the job, the company or the product is, inevitably, a more difficult to measure concept.

The third set of hypotheses (*H3a*; *H3b*) referred to the role of ability/intelligence in decision making. The words abilities/skills and intelligence were used interchangeably in the vignettes. Predictably the variable lead to significant differences with moderate effect sizes. The able were more likely to be chosen for promotion and to stay than those of average ability. Interestingly the gender interactions went in opposite directions. More intelligent males were more likely to be promoted and less intelligent males were more likely to be made redundant than more intelligent and less intelligent females respectively.

The fourth set of hypotheses (*H4a*; *H4b*) referred to the effect of motivation. For both decisions (promotions and redundancy) this variable accounted for most of the variance being observable by the effect sizes in Tables I and II. The more motivated (with synonymous terms of drive and hard work) the more they were likely to be chosen for promotion and retaining. While the interaction with intelligence was significant it showed small effect sizes for both decisions but in interactions with experience it was thought of as very desirable.

The interactions indicate that although results go in the same direction the effect sizes show a slightly different set of priorities. For promotions the interaction of experience and ability/intelligence (E × I) seem most important but for redundancies it is experience and motivation (E × M).

It is probably true to say that none of these findings was particularly surprising or counter-intuitive. What was perhaps most interesting and less easy to predict were the effect sizes or the amount of weight given to the various factors. The factor most easy to measure objectively, namely experience, was rated slightly less importantly than intelligence (but equal for redundancies) but the most important factor namely motivation is clearly the most complex and the most difficult to assess. Presumably those who manage others and are primarily responsible for making promotion and redundancy decision do have reliable data or such things as productivity, commitment and absenteeism which together with others behaviours make up the concept of motivation. It is not possible to do direct comparisons with other studies because thee are so few in this area, particularly examining the specific variables focused on here.

For instance this study did not focus on education and qualification (Powell and Butterfield, 2002), nor did it examine race (Kacmar *et al.*, 1994). But it did confirm that men with experience were rated more highly than women with experience (Tharenon *et al.*, 1994). Many of the studies in this area have pointed out that people attempt to obtain then process various pieces of information in making their decisions but that often they are influenced by facts other than the seemingly obvious variables like job knowledge, skills, experiences or abilities. One advantage of the vignette technique used in this study is that by providing focused and minimalist information one can control for the information received by the participant.

There are both limitations of this study as well as implications for practice and research. This study used the minimal information vignette technique. While this is used in many decision making contexts including the many social judgement tasks in the Tajfel tradition (Hewstone *et al.*, 1982) it has obvious limitations. First it restricts the possibly saliency of other information that maybe taken into consideration in these decisions. The researcher is always in a dilemma of being able to provide unconfounded stimuli to ensure comparison and rich, everyday data that makes experimental research very problematic. Interestingly a dozen participants were questioned after to study on what they thought about it. When asked if there seemed any crucial data was missing a few suggested that personality and attitude factors may have played a part in their decisions. All those interviewed said that the task was a difficult one and took them quite some time to make their decisions but that it was quite realistic. Two in fact said that they had been engaged in precisely this type of task over the past few months.

The study called for ratings, rather than ranking, though of course the latter can be derived from the former, but not vice versa. This was done to enable multivariate statistics to be used and was a lesson learnt from the allocation of scarce medical resources research (Furnham *et al.*, 2002). However it is debatable as to whether people actually do rankings or ratings when making these decisions.

These days difficult decisions which may easily attract litigation are done not by individuals but by committees. These committees may be tasked to follow very particular processes and they may have the power to call for various criteria like appraisal data, absenteeism figures or records of productivity before making decisions. The more process driven and procedurally justice oriented the organisation the more likely the fact that decision making is pre- and pro-scribed.

Managers who made these decisions nearly always have to trade off various qualities or traits. Should one reward effort more than ability; or ability over long service? There are within and between employee decisions that have to be made as well as considering the consequences of those who are not beneficiaries or losers of the decision. The data from this study seemed to suggest that a candidate's perceived motivation, more than their work experience (and loyalty) and their ability/intelligence were important in these decisions. In this study motivation was operationalised in terms of things like drive and capacity for hard work which is perhaps relatively easy to assess. Years of service are straight forward to assess, but intelligence/ability and motivation/conscientiousness more difficult. Yet it does seem participants believe job motivation even more important than these other factors.

This study suggests various other potentially important research avenues. The first is the effect on decision maker variables: that is their demographic (age, sex, education)

and psychographic (e.g. work attitudes, management level) correlates of these type of decisions. That is how does the biography, of the manager who makes the decisions, impact on those decisions. The second is whether these decisions are very distinctly a function of job type and level: that is whether the type of job people do strongly influences the relative power of certain factors (i.e. experience versus ability).

Thus some jobs may be very knowledge based, others skills based. Some may require high levels of intellectual processing while others may be more reliant on emotional rather than cognitive intelligence. In some jobs years of experience may be a distinct advantage while in others experience may peak earlier.

Certainly the topic of managerial decisions making about people is an important one with very clear theoretical and applied ramifications.

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