

Hiring. How to Separate the Wheat from the Chaff

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Job applicants frequently lie or cover up important information. In fact, 40% of the résumés received by companies contain inaccuracies. The result of this chicanery is that companies often end up choosing the wrong professionals, which has damaging consequences. Luckily, human resources professionals have numerous ways to prevent poor hiring decisions from being made, thus sparing themselves from embarrassing claims and improving the efficiency of their staff. Prescreening dubious résumés and in-person interviews are a couple of the formulas used, and are still the best option as they allow the hirer to look directly into the applicant's eyes and try to verify whether or not the person is telling the truth.

Nonetheless, in-person interviews only allow HR professionals to reveal distortions of the truth 35% of the time. The problem worsens in proportion to the increasing popularity of Internet-based hiring tools, which are used for much of the initial communication with the applicant, making it harder to detect whether a candidate is lying. A study done on a Web-based hiring process revealed that HR was only able to identify 8% of the applicants' lies.

However, communication with the applicant done in audio or text format can be analyzed by third parties—outside reviewers—and thereby increase the chances of detecting lies that may have slipped by the hirers—or receivers—who intervene in the process. The key question is whether the reviewers are indeed more skillful than the receivers when it comes to detecting fraud.

According to the interpersonal deception theory, lies constitute a dynamic process, and the decision to lie, a strategic process. That way, say the authors, Buller and Burgoon, the “liars” can adjust their strategy based on the receiver's reactions, which puts the

reviewers at a slight disadvantage. In case of suspicions, the latter cannot question the applicant, nor can they get a complete perspective of the communicative context in which the interview took place.

Conversely, the reviewers are less likely to be duped by strategies used by deceivers and are thus able to concentrate more on the content of the interview, given that they are spared the effort that the interviewers need to make in order to listen to the other person.

In practice, however, the reviewers also show a certain inclination toward believing in the versions being given by interviewees due to the “honesty effect,” which predisposes in-person examiners to judge applicants favorably, unless, of course, they find reason to do otherwise, as shown clearly by Stiff, Kim and Ramesh in their 1992 work *Truth Biases and Aroused Suspicion in Relational Deception*. It should be pointed out that the warnings given to reviewers about potentially suspect information are a good way to offset this tendency to believe in the applicant’s integrity.

Online Tools

The current boom in specialized websites impels human resources professionals to ask themselves a key question: to what extent do audio- or text-based communication channels help reviewers detect lies. According to our study “Detecting Deception in Computer-Mediated Interviewing” (which is currently being revised and prepared by the authors of this article, along with Joey George, Kent Marett and Brian Keane), the reviewers obtain a 20% success rate in lie detection.

Also, reviewers that have been warned about possible inconsistencies with the applicant get better results than the others—nearly twice as good—without creating any more false alarms than the others. Another important fact to come from the study is that the type of communication channel used for the interview (audio or text) does not seem to have a significant influence on detection skills nor increase the number of false alarms.

This allows HR professionals to improve their ability to detect falsehoods by using tools that are simple but effective, the likes of those provided by websites such as

Fitability.com and SelectPro.net. Armed with these resources and a well-prepared work team, companies are in better shape when it comes to separating the wheat from the chaff in order to build a great staff