

# Removing Cronyism in Undergraduate Team Member Selection

**Joseph M. Goodman**

*University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA*

**Brittany Owens**

*Louisiana State University, USA*

**Keith Credo**

*University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA*

**Abstract.** Conventional wisdom suggests employers “hire hard, manage easy”, but entry-level employees generally lack the experience to adequately screen and select candidates. Selection biases tend to reduce effectiveness of the hiring process, particularly amongst managers unfamiliar with the selection process and the role of some common implicit biases (e.g. “halo” and “horn” effects, familiarity bias, and similarity bias). This manuscript describes a team member selection activity that not only removes tendencies towards cronyism in self-selected student groups, but also trains undergraduate Project Managers to select team members through a masked applicant pool. The method combines a variety of tools that hiring managers and human resource professionals commonly use when selecting individuals for organizations and work or task teams. Project Managers “draft” the members of their project groups using unidentifiable data points from cognitive tests, personality surveys, and self-reported skill data. A rationale for the procedure, the selection process, and student reflections are presented. Additional teaching notes are included for instructors wishing to adopt this hiring simulation activity to both raise student awareness of implicit bias in selection processes, and potentially reduce implicit biases among future managers.

**Keywords:** halo/horns, selection bias, student project, active learning, simulation, blind selection, Big 5, tolerance for ambiguity.

## 1. Introduction

Employee selection is a key factor for organizational success. Employee-job, employee-group, and employee-organization fit are all positively related to overall organizational performance (Werbelt & Gilliland 1999). Thus, it is increasingly important for organizations to systematically evaluate a candidate’s potential complementary and/or supplementary fit (Muchinskey & Monahan 1987). Likewise, research continues to show that graduating students understanding both employer needs and their own employee strengths can be

*This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.*

*Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url*

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JOBE/abstractjobe17credoetal.html>

*Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson [pneilson@neilsonjournals.com](mailto:pneilson@neilsonjournals.com)*

*© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2024.*

more competitive in an increasingly demanding market. (Moy & Lam 2004, p. 521; Nießen, Danner, Spengler, & Lechner 2020). Given this centrality of “fit”, robust exploration of the implicit, potential pitfalls and biases of the selection process, itself, should be of particular interest to business students’ practical education.

For decades, organizations have used work and task teams to accomplish goals and objectives (Mathieu, Hollenbeck, van Knippenberg, & Ilgen 2017). Thus, the abilities to manage a team, work as a team member, and select team members are critical for the success of future managers. Likewise, as long as teams have been popular in modern organizations, research has consistently highlighted the potential challenges that team selection presents (Schmidt & Hunter 1998). Graves and Karren (1996) argued, “Selecting individuals with good technical skills is no longer sufficient to ensure effective job performance. Due to increasing reliance on teams as a source of competitive advantage, employees must be able to work as team members” (p. 163). The in-class team activity described herein highlights some of these challenges, targeting illumination of the negative impacts of preexisting, implicit bias, as well as possible methods to overcome that bias via experiential learning in a student project setting.

## **2. Rationale Behind the Tasks**

A growing body of research is available to guide the employee/ team member selection process if prediction of job performance is, truly, central to decision-making. In predicting job performance across categories, both cognitive ability and personality are consistently effective. Conscientiousness, which taps into traits demonstrating a sense of purpose, obligation, and persistence, is the most valid personality measure for predicting job performance (Dunn, Mount, Barrick, & Ones 1995; Nießen, Danner, Spengler, & Lechner 2020). Extraversion, or being sociable, gregarious, talkative, assertive, and active, is also a valid predictor of performance, but in specific jobs. Research shows that for individuals working as managers and sales representatives, extraversion can be an important predictor of performance (Dunn *et al.* 1995; Nießen *et al.* 2020). In studies of the factors that hiring managers “actually” use, Dunn *et al.* (1995) found general mental ability was followed by conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience, agreeableness, and extraversion. These distal antecedents of cognitive ability and personality impact more proximal antecedents such as knowledge, skills, motivation, and social intelligence (Potosky & Duck 2007). Importantly, some of these factors can be captured through survey instruments but others are revealed only through interactive settings, such as interviews and workplace interactions.