

## Recruitment Consulting

# The Halo effect in recruitment: Are you a victim of this bias?

*"It's okay, we can stop the interviews, I found the perfect candidate: he wears glasses, he must necessarily be rigorous!"*

This phrase may sound like a caricature, but we all tend to attribute qualities to a person based on a first impression. This psychological phenomenon, called the halo effect, unconsciously influences our judgments and can have a considerable impact, especially in recruitment.

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A candidate who arrives at an interview well-dressed, smiling and confident will be instinctively perceived as competent and intelligent, even before their actual skills have been assessed. Conversely, another candidate, more reserved or stressed, may be judged to perform less well, even if his or her profile corresponds perfectly to the position.

This bias is often reinforced by confirmation bias, which pushes us to look only for the elements that validate our first impression rather than to question it. Thus, if a recruiter associates the wearing of glasses with rigor, the interview of the candidate concerned could be unconsciously oriented towards the validation of this perception.

Conversely, a candidate arriving 10 minutes late and with a slightly sweaty forehead, due to an unforeseen event, may immediately be perceived as not very rigorous and disorganized. Even if it is usually punctual and methodical, the interview may then turn into an unconscious search for evidence confirming this initial impression.

## 1. What is the halo effect?

The halo effect is a cognitive bias identified by psychologist Edward Thorndike in 1920. It describes the tendency to generalize a positive or negative impression to all of a person's characteristics.

In the context of recruitment, this means that a distinctive trait (such as a good looks, a natural charisma or great eloquence) can unconsciously impact the evaluation of other more objective criteria, such as technical skills or experience.

### Concrete examples:

- An extroverted and charismatic candidate may be perceived as a good leader, even if their management experience is limited.
- A well-groomed person may be judged to be more organized and professional than another less presentable candidate.

## 2. The inverted halo effect: the diabolical effect

The evil effect is the opposite of the halo effect: a negatively perceived characteristic wrongly influences a candidate's overall assessment.

Like what:

- A shy person may be judged as insecure, and therefore unsuitable for a position of responsibility, even if his or her technical skills are excellent.
- A candidate with speech difficulties could be perceived as less intelligent, when this has no connection with his or her actual cognitive abilities.

### Concrete examples in companies

In some companies, the halo effect has led to costly recruitment mistakes.

- Candidates recruited for their charisma have proven to be ineffective once in office.
- Others, rejected because of a bad first impression, could have added real value to the company.

These biases also impact diversity and inclusion. By unconsciously favouring certain profiles based on subjective criteria, recruiters risk excluding qualified candidates from underrepresented groups.

### 3. How can we limit the halo effect in recruitment?

To ensure a more objective evaluation of candidates, here are some strategies to reduce the impact of the halo effect:

- i. **Use standardized evaluation grids:** Define precise criteria and evaluate each competency independently.
- ii. **Practice structured interviews:** Ask all candidates the same questions to promote a fair comparison.
- iii. **Multiply points of view:** Involve several recruiters to limit the influence of individual judgments.
- iv. **Use objective tests:** Use practical assessments and role-playing to measure candidates' actual skills.

- v. **Becoming aware of one's own biases:** Raising recruiters' awareness of cognitive biases so that they can better identify and limit them.
- vi. **Use decision support technologies:** Use artificial intelligence to analyze applications in a more impartial way.

The halo effect is a powerful cognitive bias that can distort hiring decisions and lead to less relevant choices. By adopting more objective practices and diversifying evaluation criteria, companies can reduce this bias and select candidates based on their actual skills, rather than superficial impressions.

