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Summary

In this thesis the correlation between the first impression and the job application process is investigated. The correlation between these two variables is of significance to society because people deal with it on a regular basis. When a person is applying for a job, he wants to leave a certain impression on the people selecting the new employee. This person therefore has to know what first impression he leaves off and how this first impression could influence the job application process.

The first impression is formed primarily using the posterior cingulate cortex and the amygdala, which are activated when seeing someone. These areas of the brain concentrate the information obtained into an oversimplified image. Then, they create the generalized summary of the subject in the following thirty seconds, taking into account stereotypes and frame of reference. The combination of these two images is the first impression.

The first impression is formed on the basis of several features of the human body. These features can create a positive first impression or a negative first impression depending on their state. Stereotypes and prejudice are tools that make that people can classify other people in a matter of seconds. Their judgement or classification is additional information on the basis of which a more specified first impression is made.

There are factors that influence the job application process alongside the first impression. The importance of experience, competences, capacities, level of education and personality traits to the job application process are all relevant in their level of conformity to the job description. The first impression is also a very decisive factor in the job application process. The motivation letter has proven very significant to the job application process for it is the very first impression the applicant leaves on the employer.

Personality traits are stable characteristics that more or less determine the way people behave and how people react to their surroundings. The first impression does not prove to be a good predictor of personality traits in the research, because of the existence of stereotypes, the absence of a second chance and the halo effect. Finally, personality traits are best measured with the Big Five model which will be used in the research.

The experiment that was performed for this thesis was a model of the job application process, in which the variables first impression and job application process could be combined. The focus of the experiment was on the trustworthiness of the first impression formed during the job application process.

The results of the experiment conclude that after seeing a person for 15 milliseconds 18.04% of the personality traits shown were observed correctly. Moreover only 16.32% of the total personality traits of the applicant were observed. After seeing a person for 30 seconds 42.92% of the personality traits were scored correctly, but only 15.54% of the personality traits of an applicant were scored correctly.

From this can be concluded that the results and the literary research have shown that the first impression is not a reliable predictor of personality traits. The literary research did however conclude that the first impression is a prominent factor in the job application process.

Introduction

"First impressions are a constant in society. However, their product, the period that proves or disproves their validity is not; good ones are pleasant and long lasting, bad ones long and difficult to disprove." (Diego Velasquez)

This quote proves that the first impression we make and the first impressions we get are of great interest to many people, us included. This comes from the fact that we do not exactly know what first impression we leave on a person and we are not really sure what the importance is of the first impression in our behaviour. We do not want to know if we really judge a book by its cover, all of us want to think that we are objective in our judgements of others.

This is what made us interested in the topic. At first we wanted to investigate the influence of the first impression on dating. However, that presented too many ethical issues. Was kissing part of the first impression and can you force people to kiss. Plus dating presents a very personal aspect, we don't choose the people we fall in love with and that is different every time.

So then we thought of another setting in which the first impression seemed influential. The job application process, in which people have to judge whether or not they want to work with the person in front of them in one or two conversations. This means that the first impression is of great influence in the application process.

We want to investigate what the influence of the first impression is on the job application process, because the job application process is a very important process for society. People have to work to earn money and in order to get a job they have to apply to a job. Thus, making the job application process as efficient as possible is of interest to society. The effects of the first impression on the job application could speed up the process very much. Therefore, we have made this research question: *To what extent does the first impression act as a prominent and decisive factor during a job application?*

The assumption that we made on the basis of the literary research, which we will describe in the theory, is that the first impression is in fact a very influential factor in the job application process. The hypothesis that we derived from that is: *The first impression will prove itself to be the conclusive factor in determining whether an applicant will be hired or not. The first impression imprints itself into the brain of the employer and this image will remain a decisive factor in the conclusion to hire the applicant.*

1. *Research setup*

For this thesis, literary investigation is needed. The different aspects of the first impression, as well as the process of a job application are to be investigated in order to provide the theory.

For the actual experiment; testing the first impression in the context of a job application, six applicants will be selected. Of these six, three applicants will be female and three applicants will be male, to ensure that the results are varied and different aspects (gender is one of them) are considered in the experiment.

The six applicants will take a personality test, the "Big Five Test", provided by a certified testing agency, the RINO Group. The Big Five Test is a test especially designed to measure personality traits, and will provide an accurate picture of the personality traits the applicant possesses. The RINO Group will process the Big Five Test as answered by the applicants, to ensure maximum authenticity.

To determine the fifteen millisecond first impression the applicants will then be photographed from the waist up, standing in front of a neutral background. This picture will be used in the simulation of the job application process.

A short video-clip will then be filmed for every applicant. The applicant will walk into a room, shake hands with a person and answer some questions about themselves. The video will be used to determine the 30 second first impression. Both the photograph and the video will ensure a maximally controlled environment.

An application committee will be selected as the second step of the experiment. The committee will consist of 12 people, and similarly to the applicants, half of the committee will be female and the other half will be male. The committee will consist of professionals with a minimum of HBO level degree, who work for respected organisations, namely the NVZ and STEK Jeugdhulp. For their part of the research, two questionnaires will be composed. One will include questions about the applicant that the committee has to answer on the basis of the photograph of the applicant and the other questionnaire will include questions about the applicant that the committee has to answer on the basis of the video of the applicant. Both questionnaires will be able to be cross-referenced with the results of the Big Five Test the applicant filled out. This is done to be able to investigate the difference between what people think they see and what is actually there.

The application procedure will then begin. The committee will first be shown the picture of the first applicant. They will only see it for 1 second. After this period of time, they will fill out the questionnaire accompanying the photograph. When they have finished filling out the first questionnaire, they will be shown the video of the first applicant. After seeing the video, they will fill out the second questionnaire accompanying the video. This process will be repeated six times, once for each applicant.

Afterwards all the results will be combined using Excel, for this gives the best overview of data. The results will first be categorised in two, results of the picture and the results of the video. The results of the picture will also be divided in two, the results that refer to the

personality traits and the results that refer to the applicant. The results of the video will be divided in the same two groups.

2. Theory

1.1. The overall first impression

In this paragraph, the first impression and its formation are discussed.

The formation of the first impression is a unique process that can be separated into two phases: the unconscious phase, made in the first fifteen milliseconds, and the conscious phase, composed in the first thirty seconds after meeting someone. The unconscious first impression is created without us knowing, and involved in laying the basis on which we act out to the subject. The conscious first impression involves completing this image, taking into account stereotypes and earlier experiences.

What is the first impression?

When someone is encountered for the first time, the brain immediately starts working to find out how to respond to this person. This is essentially the first impression: a basis on which we act out to the newly acquainted person. Because we don't know the subject, we need to work out a way to respond to this person. The first impression we get of someone, is ultimately a tool for our brain to know how we have to respond and interact with the subject.

There are primarily two neural regions involved in creating the first impression: the posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) and the amygdala. This was found in an experiment conducted by the New York University in association with Harvard University by Schiller, Freeman, Mitchell, Uleman and Phelps in 2009. The researchers found, using functional magnetic resonance imaging to measure the blood oxygenation level-dependent (BOLD) signals, that these two regions of the brain are most responsive in encoding the information that is received when someone is met for the first time.

The amygdala is located in the medial temporal lobe and also serves when learning about inanimate objects and creating social evaluations on trustworthiness or race. It is also essential for the formation and expression of emotional value. Because we use this region of the brain to determine the first impression, it can be assumed that trustworthiness, which is evaluated by this region, is something we look for when first encountering someone. (Schiller, D; Freeman, J; Mitchell, J; Uleman, J; Phelps, E, 2009)

The posterior cingulate cortex, the backmost part of the cingulate cortex in the limbic lobe of the brain, is linked to giving emotional value to rewards and also with economic decision-making. These two areas of the brain are most responsive when first encountering someone, and thus the prime creators of the first impression. They sort through the information and summarize it into a general impression of the subject: the first impression.

What is essential in the first fifteen milliseconds?

When we first lay eyes onto a new acquaintance, our brain immediately needs to decide whether this person is trustworthy or not. The first fifteen milliseconds are proven to be the most important in this (Vonk, 2006). In the first fifteen milliseconds, the first impression we get from the subject is called 'quick and dirty' (Vonk, 2006). The first look we

lay on someone is enough to form an unconscious opinion of someone, a premature basis to act out to the subject.

This response-mechanism is based all the way back to the Prehistoric Age, when our ancestors had only very little time to decide whether they were dealing with an enemy or with an ally. This split second unconscious decision making is still with us today. The two neural regions mentioned earlier, the amygdala and the posterior cingulate cortex are the most active in this stage, the first sighting.

The features we can register just by sight – posture, face, attractiveness – are all compiled into a raw, oversimplified image of the subject. This happens without us knowing and we cannot do anything to stop it. At the same time, we do use this impression in further interaction with the subject.

What is essential in the first 30 seconds?

In the first 30 seconds, we start expanding the initial unconscious impression. This is also when we consciously take into account certain aspects of the subject, while at the same time making unconscious assumptions. (Vonk, 2006)

The method our brain uses for this is called 'thin slicing of behaviour'. Thin slicing is the process of making assumptions according to tiny 'slices' of a personality we observe – unconsciously – when we meet or speak to someone. (Vonk, 2006; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). The features or traits we notice about the subject are unconsciously linked to previous experiences with these features, using the frame of reference.

Stereotypes also come into effect here: we link certain features to stereotypes, giving us a way to assume how the subject will act and how to react on that. The thirty seconds is enough time to make that all up and create the generalized summary, which is done by the amygdala and the posterior cingulate cortex in our brain. This summary, the completed first impression, will serve as the motive on how we act out to the subject from here on.

To review, the first impression is formed primarily using the posterior cingulated cortex and the amygdala, which are activated when first seeing someone. They concentrate the information: during the first fifteen milliseconds. They concentrate it into an oversimplified image to lay the basis of how we proceed to interact with this person. Then, they create the generalized summary of the subject in the following thirty seconds, taking into account stereotypes and earlier experiences. This gives the completed first impression. With this complete first impression, we decide how to interact with the subject.

1.2. Further examination of the first impression

There are several factors involved in creating the first impression. When the subject is first seen we observe the features and connect them to earlier experiences to create the first impression, as shown in chapter 1. In this chapter, the specific factors are explained. Which factors have a positive effect and which have a negative effect is also being discussed. The influence of stereotypes and prejudices are also examined.

Which factors are defining for a first impression?

There are a couple of factors that are vitally important for the first impression.

First; overall physical attractiveness. The degree to which the subject is attractive to the receiver is important for the first impression, because it is again something that has to do with the primal instincts of the human kind. (Vonk, 2006)

The face is a prominent factor in creating the first impression as well, as it is among the first things seen when first meeting someone. A lot can be deducted from the face, as each face is unique and each person is unique as well. Important features here are the eyes, the forehead, the cheekbones, the mouth and lips and the eyebrows. (Vonk, 2006; Rule and Ambady, 2010)

Hair also has a lot of influence. The haircut and hair colour are noticed as soon as the face is, as well as facial hair is for men. They are important because of the 'framing' they do for the face and head: they finish that picture. (Vonk, 2006)

While the above mentioned factors are noticed in the unconscious fifteen millisecond impression, the body is also important for the first impression, and especially for the thirty second first impression, the conscious one. The factor "body" therefore is just as important as the face. The length of the body also belongs to this factor. With these factors, conclusions are drawn about the subject. (Vonk, 2006)

The non-verbal communication is another part of the conscious first impression. Facial expression, eye contact, distance and personal space and the handshake are all features categorized as non-verbal communication. They are important because they are all signals send to the receiver that combine into a bigger picture: they basically finish off the first impression (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006).

Body language is a separate part of non-verbal communication, and worth discussing separately because it consists of more than just the way the subject stands or what gestures the subject makes. Body language takes into account stance, the use of space and of course also; movement. It is important because it tells something about the relationship the subject has to the receiver, and certain personality traits are also visible through body language. (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006) Combining all of these features, the first impression is created.

Which factors make a good first impression?

Physical attractiveness is a very subjective thing, and this is different for every single individual. However, the human race again acts on primal instincts: what is beautiful is good. This assumption again dates back to the Prehistoric Age and the quick decision making, and also to the neural regions that create the first impression: the amygdala also controls the social evaluations of trustworthiness (Schiller, Freeman, Mitchell, Uleman & Phelps, 2009). So, an attractive person contributes to a better first impression than an unattractive person (Vonk, 2006). Special attention should be given to the so-called 'halo-effect' here: when first seeing the subject and recognizing a good personality trait in them, this will have a lot of influence. Think of trustworthiness: what is beautiful is good. The receiver will often assume this subject has many other positive personality traits as well. (Vonk, 2006)

As for the face, a good first impression is made when a face radiates maturity: large jaw, prominent eyebrows, a small forehead, and pronounced cheekbones (Vonk, 2006; Rule and Ambady, 2010). These factors combine into a dominant, mature and independent subject. However, trustworthiness seems to be the most important feature that has to be seen in the face (Rule and Ambady, 2010). This has again something to do with the amygdala, which is stimulated when first encountering someone. Trustworthiness in the face can be conveyed with high inner eyebrows, a wide chin and pronounced cheekbones (Willis and Todorov, 2006).

As for hair, men with hair are overall perceived as younger, more dominating, more dynamic and manlier. Short hair is the best option here: men with short hair are perceived as careful, intelligent, mature, manly and strong (Vonk, 2006). For women, the hair colour is equally important: redheaded women are seen as competent and professional, strong and creative. Brunettes are perceived as elegant and mysterious (Vonk, 2006). An athletic physique is perceived as healthy, assertive, confident and aggressive. (Vonk, 2006) The figure is also important: a woman having an 'hourglass' figure is considered influential, assertive, confident and competent (Vonk, 2006). Length also does its part here: tall men leave a better impression, as they are seen as more intelligent, more athletic, more attractive, manlier and more professional. Tall women leave the same good impression: they are perceived as more intelligent, more fluent (in speech), more professional, more assertive and more ambitious (Vonk, 2006).

The right choice of clothing – appropriate for the situation – also leaves a good first impression, as well as choosing colours that complement skin tone and suit the subject well. For instance, a dark blue suit on a man creates a mature, strict and dominant image. (Vonk, 2006)

As for non-verbal communication, this specific factor consists of a lot of different features. A genuine smile has a positive influence on the first impression, as well as eye-contact for the appropriate time. An appropriate amount of personal space – not too close, not too far away – also has a positive effect. The amount of personal space completely depends on the relation the subject has to the receiver. If the subject manages to hold an amount of personal space appropriate to the situation and the relation to the receiver, this makes for a good first impression. Cultural values are also important for personal space, as well as eye-contact. Not every culture appreciates eye-contact, but looking into the eyes for the appropriate amount of time, in relation to the situation and the relationship between subject and receiver, contributes to a good first impression as well (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006). As for the handshake, the strength and firmness of the handshake also differs per culture and per relationship. In general the subject leaves a good first impression when the firmness is the right amount, the complete hand is shaken, the handshake isn't too long and neither too short. To top it off, eye contact must be made during the handshake. This also contributes to a good first impression. (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006)

As for body language, if the subject stands straight, with straight shoulders and chin up, the image that is transferred is positive and has an air of confidence and trustworthiness.

Walking and gesturing are also a part of this. If the subject walks with powerful steps and taking long strides this is perceived as youthful and energetic. The amount of space someone uses is also important for body language: if the subject takes in more space while sitting or standing, they are perceived as more powerful and confident. If the subject uses so-called voice supporting gestures, they are seen as persuasive, which is a good trait for a good first impression (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006).

Which factors make a bad first impression?

Again, reacting out of primal instinct, less attractive people leave a relatively worse first impression. What is ugly can never be good: this was the appropriate way of thinking in the Prehistoric Age. This can also cause a negative halo-effect: if the subject is rejected only because of their unattractiveness, the receiver might not have interest in interacting with this subject at all, as they might believe they do not have any other positive traits. (Vonk, 2006)

As for the face, subjects with large eyes, round face, thin eyebrows and a small nose (a so-called 'baby face) are not believed to be mature and to have authority, but they need to be protected. This does not leave a good first impression, as the subject cannot take care of themselves. (Vonk, 2006)

As for hair, being bald does not leave a good first impression for men. Men with long hair are also not positively perceived: they are seen as female, immoral, free-riding and complex. Hair colour also has its influence: blond women are perceived as dumb, incompetent and naïve. This leaves a bad first impression. Ginger men have the same problem: they are seen as easily hurt, female and not very successful. (Vonk, 2006) If the subject has a lot of body fat, they are perceived as lazy, unhealthy and unintelligent. This does not leave a good first impression. Being short is not a good feature for men either. They are seen as less intelligent, less athletic, less attractive, less manly and less professional. Short women suffer the same faith: they are also perceived as less intelligent, less fluent (in speech), less professional, less assertive and less ambitious (Vonk, 2006). All of this does not contribute to a good first impression.

For clothing, an outfit inappropriate to the situation leaves a bad first impression. For women, dressing too sexy during a job interview leaves a bad first impression, as they are perceived as easy and unprofessional. Clothes that do not look good on the subject (wrong colour, strange model) do not leave a good first impression either. (Vonk, 2006)

With non-verbal communication, a bad first impression is often left when not using the appropriate features for the appropriate amount of time. For instance, if the subject looks the receiver too long directly in the eye, this evokes feelings of aggression, which is not a good first impression. The subject standing too close to the receiver also leaves a bad first impression: this is an invasion of personal space and not a good idea if the subject wants to make a good first impression. (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006)

If the subject has an overall closed off posture – standing hunched over, not looking anyone in the eye – this will also leave a bad first impression. If the subject walks with small steps, going slowly and shuffling with its feet, he/she will be seen as less powerful, less happy

and less confident. Also, taking in less space when walking and sitting contributes to a bad first impression. As for the handshake, not conforming to manners of etiquette when shaking someone's hand contributes to a bad first impression. For instance; when a grip is too firm or only half of the hand is gripped when shaking. (Vonk and Dijkstra, 2006)

What is the influence of stereotypes on the first impression?

Stereotypes are the expectations people have about certain groups of other people, depending on race, gender, profession or certain physical features. Stereotyping is the process of assigning certain features and qualities to people that are met for the first time, in order to create an expectation about them to know how to react to them. Stereotyping is a process done unconsciously and therefore it is not possible to stop stereotyping from happening. It is done to create order in observations and to interpret the observed first impression. If many/all the features explained earlier combine into a stereotype, the receiver will use that stereotype to act out to the subject, even it might not be totally true for that specific person. (Vonk, 2006)

It can be said that stereotypes have a lot of influence. The stereotypes the receiver knows are a tool to interpret the first impression, looking for a way to interact with the subject. Therefore, the first impressions and the known stereotypes work together to form an impression about the subject, to interpret the features observed, and to know how to proceed in interacting with them (Vonk, 2006). However, if the subject turns out not to comply with the stereotype, the receiver often changes the opinion on the subject to the appropriate one. In general, it is harder to change the stereotype than to change the specific opinion on a person. (Vonk, 2006)

What is the influence of prejudice on the first impression?

A prejudice is essentially something the receiver deduces from observing the subject, and connecting it to ideas already present in their minds to create an expectation about the subject.

The main difference between stereotyping and prejudging is that stereotyping is done for an entire group, while prejudging happens on individual level. Also, stereotyping is done unconsciously, while prejudgment also happens consciously and is thought about. Prejudices are again another set of tools to know how to interact with the subject, and add meaning to observed features (Vonk, 2006). Prejudices are greatly influenced by past experiences and the frame of reference and connect previous experiences with people with the same features to the subject, and try to find out a way to deal with the subject by using knowledge acquired previously. Prejudices have an essential negative reputation, as they often do not fit the subject. However, prejudices can be adjusted to the positive as well: they are just laying another basis to act out on.

The influence prejudices have is that they offer another way of knowing how to react to the subject. They interpret specific features into a personal image of the subject, and they give yet again more content to the expectations about the subject, to know how they are

going to react. This will prove useful when approaching the subject, and continuing interacting with them. (Vonk, 2006)

To summarise; all the factors mentioned in this chapter together combine into the first impression. All the basic factors have several features that are judged. Combining all of these factors, the first impression is created. Some features help for a good first impression, some leave a contrary judgment. Stereotyping and prejudice are tools to create a basis to act out on towards the subject. They interpret the first impression and find ways to react to the subject. Stereotyping works on large groups while prejudgment is used on individuals.

1.3. The job application process

The job application process needs a further examination in our research because there are multiple other factors involved with recruitment and selection than the first impression alone. Making solid conclusions on the influence of the first impression in the job application process therefore has to be preceded by the examination of the influence of other factors on the job application process. The elements to be examined further are; the factors that elevate the chance of success, the experience of the applicant, the competences of the applicant, the capacities of the applicant, the level of education of the applicant, the personality traits of the applicant and of course the motivation- letter.

Which factors elevate the chance of success during the job application process?

In different research different factors have shown to elevate the chance of success during the application process. Research executed by ten Horn (1999) concluded that intelligence, acuteness, emotional stability and adequate social skills have proven to elevate the chance of success. In addition research by Vonk (2006) concluded that of the social skills the abilities to praise yourself or to praise the interviewer are most important. However a balance between these is needed, the applicant should not only praise themselves nor should they only praise the interviewer. Social orientation, economic stability, work ethic orientation, educational achievement and interpersonal confidence were the factors most likely to elevate the chance of success during the application procedure according to Childs (Childs et al., 1986). Among teens the willingness to sacrifice ambition was found to be an elevator for success (Sinnaeve, 2004), meaning that the applicant should be willing to perform the less exciting parts of the job as well.

Of the factors mentioned the following influence the first impression the most; social skills, interpersonal confidence and emotional stability. As a result these are the factors that will be examined further in our research.

What is the importance of experience for the job application process?

There are two types of experience: one is life experience and the second is work experience. Life experience influences the job application process as an additional aspect. The life experience is formed mostly by the age of the applicant. To the extent that a younger

applicant will have less life experience than an older applicant, this will influence the job application process when there is a certain level of life experience required for the job.

Work experience influences the job application process significantly. Research (Vonk, 2006) has concluded that when the job experience of the applicant matches with the experience needed for the position the chance that the applicant will be hired is far greater. Negative aspects of the applicant may even be overlooked in this case. The research conducted by Vonk (2006) and the research conducted by ten Horn (1999) both conclude that work experience influences the job application process in the level of conformity to the experience needed for the position.

What is the importance of competences and capacity for the job application process?

Competences and capacity are not things that can be measured with the naked eye. In the past this meant that their importance to the application process was small. Since competences and capacity would not be measured during the application process. However, now the competences and capacity of the applicant are measured more often. This recent development is caused by the rise of competences management. Research conducted by Bandhoe (2011) has shown that through the measurement of the competences the applicants are more carefully selected. This means that the importance of competences and capacity has certainly grown but is still less significant than the importance of experience. The competences of the applicant influence the application process to the level of conformity with the competences needed for the position.

What is the importance of the level of education for the job application process?

The level of education can be split up in two separate sections. The first is the highest achieved educational level. This influences the job application process only in the way that the highest achieved educational level of the applicant has to match the educational level needed for the position.

The other part of the level of education deals with the skills acquired by the applicant through education. This influences the job application process because the skills acquired by the applicant have to match with the skills needed for the position.

What is the importance of personality traits for the job application process?

Personality traits can be measured in three ways during the job application process. (Rollinson et al., 1998) The first is through the first impression. On this basis assumptions about the personality traits of the applicant can be made. The second is through the interview. On this basis assumptions about the personality traits of the applicant can be made. The last is through a personality trait test. On this basis conclusions about the personality traits can be made. The personality traits of the applicant are of importance to the application process for the personality traits of the applicant need to match the personality traits needed for the position.

In what way does the first impression influence the job application process?

The study executed by Vonk (2006) concluded that the first impression is one of the most decisive factors in the job application process. Her research concluded that the decision to hire a person or not is formed after a couple of minutes and therefore the rest of the conversation could be skipped. The first impression can however be altered, in a very small amount, during the conversation. This happens when the applicant answers the questions of the committee in a way that does not conform to the first impression obtained by the committee of the applicant, because this conflict in first impression and behaviour will always be "won" by the behaviour. Therefore, the first impression that a person has of another person will always be altered if the behaviour of this person contradicts the first impression, because what we see seems truer than what we think.

In what way does the motivation letter contribute to the job application process?

Vonk (2006) has conducted research specifically to the motivational letter. According to her research, the motivation letter is of critical importance to the job application process. It is the very first impression that the applicant leaves on the employers and it is the basis on which the employer will invite the applicant for an interview or not. There are a lot of factors that influence whether the motivation letter is seen as good or bad. Besides factors that the applicant can influence there are also factors that the applicant can't influence, such as name and ethnicity. To review; the motivation letter contributes greatly to the job application process.

To summarise this chapter, there are factors that influence the job application process alongside the first impression. The factors that can elevate the chance of success during a job application process are diverse. Three of these factors can also be measured by the first impression (social skills, interpersonal confidence and emotional stability). These factors will therefore be examined further in our research. The importance of experience, competences, capacities, level of education and personality traits to the job application process are all relevant in their level of conformity to the job description. The motivation letter has proven very significant to the job application process for it is the very first impression the applicant leaves on the employer. This would mean that after reading the resume and motivational letter and seeing the applicant for a few minutes the conversation is irrelevant to the decision to hire an applicant or not. Even though the personality traits of the applicant are not decisive to the job application process, they are measured by the first impression and are therefore significant to the research. In the following chapter the personality traits and their influence will be further examined.

1.4. Personality traits

The previous chapter concluded that the personality traits of the applicant are not the most decisive for the job application process. They are however measured by the first impression and create the picture of the applicant to the interviewer. This is why they are significant to the research and why they will be examined further in this chapter.

In this chapter the term personality traits will be used instead of the term personal characteristics. Knowing the difference between these terms is of critical importance to the research. The difference between the two terms can be reduced to the difference between personality and person. The person can be seen as the frame that is filled in by the personality. In this way the difference between personality traits and personal characteristics can be explained by saying that personal characteristics can be; fat, attractive or ugly. Personality traits on the other hand are; socially skilled, anxious or closed.

What are personality traits?

Personality traits are stable characteristics that more or less determine the way people behave and how people react to their surroundings. The personality of a person is a dynamic and organised total of characteristics that can be granted to a person. This total of characteristics determines the way in which a person reacts in different situations, the way in which a person thinks and what motivates the person. A personality trait does not relate to behaviour but more to character, intentions and attitude.

To what extent is the first impression a good predictor for the personality traits of an applicant?

According to Vonk (2006) the first impression is not at all a good predictor of the personality traits of an applicant, it is however often the only predictor. According to Vonk it is the only natural predictor of the personality traits known to people. It is however not a good predictor of personality traits because of the influence of stereotypes, the absence of a second chance and the halo effect.

Stereotypes are evolutionary categories that every human makes to protect him/herself against danger. However in the modern world some stereotypes have come to exist without cause, like the presumption that blondes are dumb. This makes that there is no such thing as an objective first impression. Therefore the absence of objectivity makes the first impression unreliable.

The absence of a second chance to a good first impression means that the person is fully dependant on its surroundings and situation for a good first impression. When the person is not feeling to well he/she will already make a bad first impression. This also says something about the subjectivity and the changeability of the first impression. A person may leave a totally different first impression on one person than on another person.

The halo effect (Rollinson, 1998) is the assumption that because a person has a certain trait the person will automatically also have other traits. This works both positively and negatively, a person with one good trait is immediately assumed to have more good traits and vice versa. This means that the first impression is not only subjective but it can also be based on assumptions to traits. This means that a person with a very obvious good trait like being socially skilled will always leave a better first impression than a person with rusty social skills.

This means that the first impression will, according to the literature we examined, not prove to be a good predictor of the personality traits of an applicant in our research.

How can personality traits be measured?

Personality traits can be measured by using personality trait questionnaires. The different possibilities of personality types are usually registered beforehand in a personality model, because personality is a complex concept. Therefore personality is commonly tested on the basis of a personality model. One of the most commonly used personality models is the Big Five. The name of this personality model is derived from the five character traits that are distinguished in the model. The Big Five theory (Goldberg, 1981) is considered to be the most important personality model among psychologists.

In the model many individual differences are grouped together in five independent factors;

1. Openness (to new things)
2. Conscientiousness (organised)
3. Extraversion
4. Altruism (compassionate)
5. Neuroticism (emotional instability).

The last two are considered most decisive for the functioning of a person in a work environment.

The Big Five model has been generated by collecting all the words to describe people with, there are thousands. Thereupon it was found that a lot of these words are used to describe the same type of person. When people find someone talkative they will probably also score this person as spontaneous. Subsequently these traits are alike and belong to the same personality trait: extraversion. However, if two character traits are not used to describe the same person above average, they are not related. This would mean that these traits belong to a different personality trait. In this way the researchers ultimately arrived at five personality traits. One could state that these are the five most common denominators of all character traits.

A very important characteristic of the Big Five is that the scores of personality traits are (statistically) normally distributed. This means that a person is not only extravert or introvert; they can also be something in between. Additionally the five personality dimensions are described using abstract terms from psychology, e.g. extraversion or neuroticism. This is better than using words that have a really specific meaning in the common language, like friendliness. Among others these are the reasons for the usage of the Big Five personality model in the research.

To review, personality traits are stable characteristics that more or less determine the way people behave and how people react to their surroundings. The first impression will, on the basis of the literature studied, not prove to be a good predictor of personality traits in the research, because of the existence of stereotypes, the absence of a second chance and the halo effect. Finally, personality traits are best measured with the Big Five model which will be used in the research.

3. *Data & Method*

In the experiment, the accuracy of the first impression in the application process was tested. An application committee judged 6 applicants, after first seeing their picture, name and age, and then seeing a short video in which the applicants introduce themselves and explain why they want the job. They were judged on personality traits they possessed. The procedure was chosen because it mimics the application process the best, and it created the most controlled environment for a job application.

An application committee was selected, as well as six applicants. The application committee, in this simulation, was the possible employer, while the applicants were the possible employees.

The six applicants, aged 17-19, were three females and three males and their contribution consisted of three parts: having a photograph taken, participating in filming a short video in which they introduced themselves, and filling out a personality test: The Big Five, discussed in paragraph 1.4.

The applicants were asked to approach the filming of the video as if they were actually applying for a job. An authority figure was asked to be their possible employer. The applicant entered the room, shook hands with the authority figure, introduced themselves, and explained to the authority figure why they thought they should be getting the job, as if it was a genuine job application. All of this was videotaped into a 30 second clip. The clip served as a tool for determining the 30 second (conscious) first impression.

The applicants were then photographed. The pictures were taken from the middle up, with the applicants standing in front of a white screen. The picture would serve as the tool for determining the fifteen millisecond (unconscious) first impression. The picture gives a direct copy of the applicant: it is basically what is seen first as well.

The picture and video were used because they ensured a maximum controlled environment: all the applicants were asked the same sort of questions and the authority figure created an atmosphere similar to a 'real' job application. The controlled environment ensured the most detailed and reliable results.

The last step in their involvement in the experiment was filling out a questionnaire, The Big Five Test, discussed in paragraph 1.4. A certified testing agency, the RINO Group, designed the test and evaluated the results of this test to ensure maximum authenticity. The test provided an extensive overview of the personality traits of the applicants. The test gives the results with which the results of the selection/application committee were compared.

This was the last involvement of the applicants. Their clips and photos were incorporated into a presentation, which was shown for the application committee. The presentation was again chosen to create a maximum controlled environment.

The application committee consisted of 6 men and 6 women. A diverse group was requested to ensure different results all able for comparison. These twelve men and women all have degrees on HBO or university level, and they work for either Stek Jeugdhulp or NVZ. All the committee members were handed two questionnaires per applicant, one for the

picture and one for the video.

First, they were shown the picture, name and age of the applicant. The presentation switched to a black slide and the application members had to fill out the first questionnaire. This questionnaire had a list of 25 personality traits and the members of the application committee were asked to choose the traits describing the applicant. They had to check at least one and at maximum 25 of the personality traits. A form like this was chosen because it would activate the subconscious: the committee members had to choose the personality traits that matched without thinking too much about it.

After that, the committee was shown the 30-second clip of the applicant. When the video stopped, they had to fill out the second questionnaire, which contained 21 statements about the applicant. The 21 statements all described different facets of the Big Five. Each statement had a scale divided into five categories: low, relatively low, neutral, relatively high, and high.

The committee had to choose which of the five categories matched what they saw in the video, and tick that category. This procedure was chosen because it gave a clear review of the conscious first impression, as the application committee members had to think about every judgment they made on each personality trait.

This process was repeated six times, until each member of the committee had filled out two questionnaires on each applicant.

This process resulted in two databases: one with the actual personality traits of the applicants, and one with the assumptions the committee members had made by only seeing them very shortly.

To process these results, the data was cross-referenced with each other. First, all the results were processed in the computer. The results of the questionnaire with the photo were compared to the Big Five Test as follows: the questionnaire's categories were analysed on the basis of whether or not being directly related to one of the facets of the five factors of the Big Five (Extraversion, Openness, Altruism, Neuroticism and Conscientiousness). It was a match when the personality trait that the applicant scored high, relatively high or neutral on was ticked by the application committee on the corresponding questionnaire. So if a member had ticked the boss expressing a facet of Extraversion, and the applicant had scored high on that particular facet, it was noted as a match. The percentages that were the result show which facets of the Big Five were recognized the best by just seeing the picture.

For the questionnaire with the video, the results of the video questionnaire were again compared to the Big Five Test. Again, it was a match when a trait that was scored high, relatively high, or neutral by the committee matched the score that the applicants had on the official Big Five test. Again, the percentages that were the result showed what facets of the Big Five were noticed by the application committee in the video.

4. Results

The results of the picture regarding the factors of the Big Five

In the results with respect to the picture a match is considered to exist when a certain personality trait was scored neutral, relatively high or high in the personality test of the applicant and the committee has observed the personality trait. The total average match rate of the results of the picture regarding the factors of the Big Five is **18.04%**.

Overall the factor Extraversion has the highest match rate. Here, the match rate was 33.10%. The facet of Extraversion with the highest rate was happiness with 47.22%. The facet of Extraversion with the lowest rate was dominance with 15.27%.

The factor Altruism also scored relatively high with a score of 17.77%. The facet of Altruism with the highest rate was ambition with 18.05%. The facet of Altruism with the lowest rate was compliance with 9.70%.

The factor Openness scored 15.28% with the facet imagination.

The factor Conscientiousness scored 13.42%. The facet of Conscientiousness with the highest rate was thoughtfulness with 15.28%. The facet of Conscientiousness with the lowest rate was orderliness with 5.53%.

The factor Neuroticism had the lowest rate with 10.64%. The facet of Neuroticism with the highest rate was impulsiveness with 20.83%. The facet of Neuroticism with the lowest rate was annoyance with 0.00%.

Interpretation of the results of the picture against the factors of the Big Five

The fact that the factor Extraversion scored the highest match rate points out that the facets of Extraversion are most visible on the outside. This is the result of the fact that the facets of the factor Extraversion are for example; happiness, cordiality, sociability and energy. These are facets that are easy to read from a person without talking to them.

The fact that the other factors scored lower rates is explicable because the facets of those factors are more internal. These facets are for example; sincerity, compliance, annoyance and modesty. These are facets that will become more visible after the applicant is able to talk to the application committee.

The fact that the factor Neuroticism scored the lowest match rate points out that the facets of the factor Neuroticism are the least visible in a person's physique. This can be explained by the fact that the facets of Neuroticism are; fear, annoyance, dreariness, impulsiveness, shyness and vulnerability. These are all facets of the personality that are more likely to surface when under stress. Therefore these facets are less accurately observed in the controlled environment that was used.

The results of the picture regarding the applicants

The results of the picture regarding the applicants point out the level of accurateness with which the members of the application committee observed the personality traits present in the applicants, on the basis of the personality test, on the ground of the picture of the

applicant. On average the members of the committee observed **16.32%** of the personality traits present in the applicant.

The female committee members observed 14.36% of the personality traits present in the applicant. The male committee members observed 18.28% of the personality traits present in the applicant.

The committee members with a university degree observed 15.47% of the personality traits present in the applicant. The committee members with a HBO degree observed 17.51% of the personality traits present in the applicant.

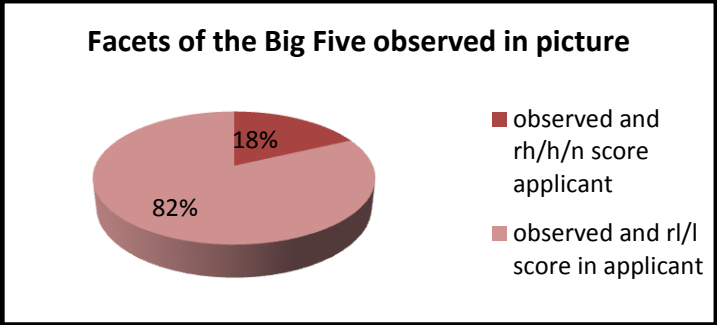
Interpretation of the results of the picture regarding applicants

The female committee members had a lower match rate than the male committee members. Common thought is that women are more sensitive than men and the assumption that is made according to that is that women will be better at observing the first impression. The results contradict this assumption.

The committee members with a university degree scored a lower match rate than the committee members with a HBO degree. The assumption made to this was that people with a university degree would be better at observing the first impression than people with a HBO degree. The results contradict this assumption.

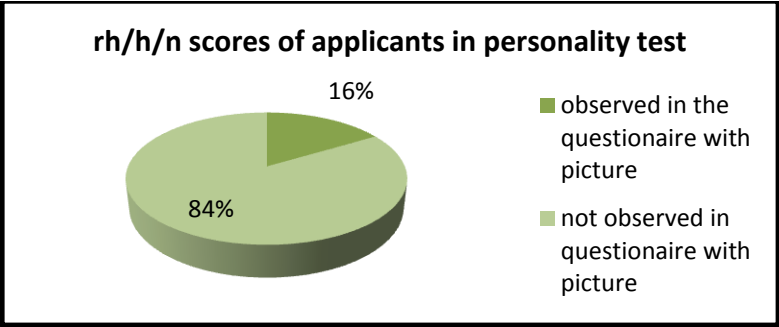
Interpretation of the overall results of the picture

The results of the picture show that the first impression is accurately observed against the factors of the Big Five 18.04% of the time. This means that in only 18.04% of the observations the facet that was observed was present in the applicant. From that follows that in 81.96% of the observations the facet was observed wrong or was not noticed at all. This means that according to the results of this experiment the first impression based upon a picture, against the facets of the Big Five, is not accurate nor a good predictor of personality traits present in the applicant.



The results of the picture show that the members of the committee were only able to observe 16.32% of the personality traits present in the applicant. This means that the committee failed to observe 83.68% of the personality traits present in the applicant, on the basis of being shown only the picture of the applicant. From this follows that the members of the committee in this experiment were not able to get a full picture of the personality traits

present in the applicant, based on a picture. The overall interpretation on the basis of the results of the picture is that the members of the committee were not able to observe most of the personality traits present in the applicant (only 16.32%) and were then not able to categorize this observation with the right facet of the Big Five (only 18.04%). This means that on the basis of the picture of the applicant the members of the committee were not able to get an accurate first impression of the applicant, nor was this first impression a good predictor of the personality traits present in the applicant.



The results of the video regarding the factors of the Big Five

The results of the video show the quantitative outcome in which the members of the committee scored the personality traits of the applicants in the same way as the personality trait was scored in the personality test of the applicant. The total average quantity of correct scores based on the video was **42.92%**.

The factor that was scored with the highest accuracy was Conscientiousness with 47.94%. The facet of Conscientiousness with the highest accuracy was ambition with 54.15%. The facet of Conscientiousness with the lowest accuracy was self-discipline with 36.11%.

The factor Neuroticism had the second highest accuracy with 45.10%. The facet of Neuroticism with the highest accuracy was annoyance with 55.55%. The facet of Neuroticism with the lowest accuracy was vulnerability with 29.18%.

The factor Altruism had the third highest accuracy with 44.11%. The facet of Altruism with the highest accuracy was compliance with 59.39%. The facet of Altruism with the lowest accuracy was modesty with 27.09%.

The factor Openness had the second lowest accuracy with 40.16%. The facet of Openness with the highest accuracy was ideas with 44.18%. The facet of Openness with the lowest accuracy was change with 36.14%.

The factor Extraversion had the lowest accuracy with 34.5%. The facet of Extraversion with the highest accuracy was happiness 53.14%. The facet of Extraversion with the lowest accuracy was dominance with 19.45%.

Interpretation of the results of the video regarding the facets of the Big Five

The fact that the factor of the Big Five with the highest accuracy was Conscientiousness could be caused by the fact that the applicants have to explain why they

would like the position in the video. This could also explain why the facet ambition of the factor Conscientiousness had the highest accuracy rate. This could mean that the committee could judge the level in which the applicant wanted the job very well. This could be more visible in the video because then the applicants verbally had to express this ambition.

The fact that the factor Neuroticism scores fairly high in the results of the video can be the product of the possibility that the facets of Neuroticism become more noticeable in stress situations. This could be because the factor Neuroticism is about emotional stability and the level of emotional stability or instability can be measured best under stressful situations. Therefore, the results could be explained because the interview that the applicants did in the video could have been a stressful situation for them and the applicants showed how they handled this.

The factor Altruism had an average accuracy rate. This could be the result of the fact that the factor Altruism measures the attitude of the person towards other people. This means that this factor could be measured better if the applicant had to mingle with other people.

The factor Openness has an average accuracy rate as well. This factor measures the level of openness to experiences that the person has. This means that in order to accurately measure the factor the committee would have to be able to experience the applicant in his/her normal life.

The factor Extraversion has the lowest accuracy rate. This could be caused by the fact that the factor Extraversion contains a couple of facets that could be measured better if the applicant would be in a group. This is because facets like; dominance, sociability and cordiality are facets that determine the behaviour of a person within a group, is this person a "leader" or a "carer". Thus these factors are hard to measure in a conversation between two people that only lasts 30 seconds.

The results of the video regarding the applicants

The results of the video regarding the applicants point out the quantitative outcome in which the members of the committee scored the personality traits of the applicant in the same way as the personality trait was scored in the official personality test of the applicant. On average the members of the committee scored accurately **15.54%** of the time.

The female committee members scored accurately 14.68% of the time. The male committee members scored accurately 16.40% of the time.

The committee members with a university degree scored accurately 16.55% of the time. The committee members with a HBO degree scored accurately 14.13% of the time.

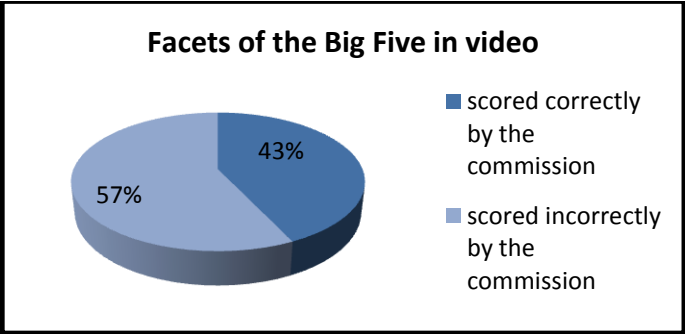
Interpretation of the results of the video regarding the applicants

In the results of the video regarding the applicants the female committee members have a lower accuracy rate than the male committee members. The general assumption to making a first impression is that because of the higher sensitivity of women they are better at forming an accurate first impression. The results of the experiment contradict this assumption.

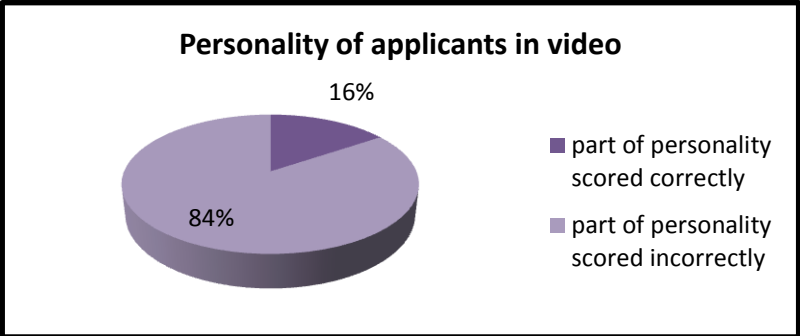
The members of the committee with a university degree had a higher accuracy rate than the members of the committee with a HBO degree. The general assumption is that people with a university degree will be better at forming an accurate first impression because of the higher intelligence. The results of this experiment also point in that direction.

Overall interpretation on the basis of the results of the video

According to the results of the video regarding the factors of the Big Five the members of the application committee were able to score the inquired facet of the Big Five the same as the personality test score of the applicant in a correct way in 42.92% of the time. This means that the application committee scored the inquired facet of the Big Five incorrectly 57.08% of the time. This outcome shows that according to the results of this experiment the chance that a person scores/reads the personality trait in a person correctly during a 30 second encounter is almost 50/50. *Therefore the assumptions to personality traits made after a 30 second encounter are not reliable and will prove to be wrong more times that they will prove to be correct.*



According to the results of the video regarding the applicants the members of the application committee only had a correct impression of 15.54% of the personality traits of the applicant. The other 84.46% of the personality traits of the applicant were scored incorrectly or were not observed. This means that the first impression that the application committee formed of the applicants' personalities was mostly incorrect. Therefore the first impression made after a 30 second encounter is highly unreliable and for the biggest part incorrect.



5. Conclusion

The overall first impression

To the question; what is the first impression? The hypothesis was; the first impression is an assumption made in the brain based on the appearance and behaviour of a person. The literary research that we performed showed that two neural regions are involved in creating the first impression; the posterior cingulate cortex and the amygdala. This means that the hypothesis is confirmed because the first impression is made in the brain. Moreover, according to the literary research these two neural regions serve in making social evaluations and decision-making. This confirms the part of the hypothesis that says that the first impression is made on the basis of the appearance and behaviour of a person.

To the question; what is essential in the first 15 milliseconds? The hypothesis was; in the first 15 milliseconds the brain alone is essential, this observation is totally unconscious. The literary research showed that the two neural regions (posterior cingulate cortex and amygdala) are the most essential in the making of the first impression during these 15 milliseconds. Furthermore the literary research also showed that the first impression based on the 15 milliseconds is fully unconscious. Therefore the literary research has confirmed this hypothesis.

To the question; what is essential in the first 30 seconds? The hypothesis was; in the first 30 seconds all other features of a person's physique and behaviour are essential. The literary research showed that in the 30 second first impression our brain makes its assumptions on the basis of the "thin slicing of behaviour" method. This means that the brain makes further unconscious and conscious assumptions on the basis of the observation of tiny slices of the personality of a person. As a result the hypothesis to this question was confirmed by the literary research.

Further examination of the first impression

To the question; which factors are defining for the first impression? The hypothesis was; the factor that defines a first impression is the combination of the physique and behavioural traits of a person. The literary research showed that the physique and the behavioural traits are indeed the most defining. To be precise; the factors that are the most defining are; the face, the hair, the body, the non-verbal communication and the body language. This means that the hypothesis to this question was confirmed by the literary research.

To the question; which factors create a good first impression? The hypothesis was; a good first impression will be made when the person in question meets the requirements of the situation he/she is in. The literary research showed that although the level in which the person is adapted to the situation he/she finds him/herself in matters, there are a couple of factors that can create a good first impression in every situation. From this follows that the hypothesis to this question was confirmed for a large part, but an addition has to be taken in to account. There are a couple of features or techniques that can elevate the chance of a good first impression in every situation.

To the question; which factors create a bad first impression? The hypothesis was; a bad first impression will be made when the person in question does not meet the requirements of the situation he/she is in. The literary research confirmed this hypothesis for the part that a first impression will be bad if the person has not met the requirements of the situation. However there are a couple of factors that can elevate the chance of a bad first impression in every situation.

To the question; what is the influence of stereotypes on the first impression? The hypothesis was; stereotypes are the basis of a first impression; they are the categories we can place people in. The literary research showed that the first impression and the stereotypes work together. The first impression is the assumption based on the person him/herself and the stereotypes are the assumptions that are made for a group of people. This means that after the first impression is made this impression is categorised in a stereotype. As a result the literary research confirmed the part of the hypothesis that the stereotypes are the categories we place people in. The literary research however contradicts the hypothesis in the part that stereotypes are the basis for the first impression. The conclusion that can be made on the basis of the literary research is that the first impression is combined with the stereotypes to categorise the person.

To the question; what is the influence of prejudice on the first impression? The hypothesis was; prejudice will influence a first impression in a large amount. The literary research showed that prejudices or prejudices offer another way of knowing how to react to the subject, and that they give more expectations about the personality of the subject. This means that prejudice offers an addition to the first impression. Therefore the literary research contradicted the hypothesis because the prejudice is not essential to the first impression but will add another layer of expectation to the first impression.

The job application process

To the question; which factors elevate the chance of success during the job application process? The hypothesis was; in a job interview the applicant can either praise themselves, praise the person they are impressing or conform to the standards of this person. The literary research contradicted this because the factors that turned out to elevate the chance of success during the job application process the most were; social skills, interpersonal confidence and emotional stability. The factors mentioned in the hypothesis are only a sub-factor to the factor social skills.

To the question; what is the importance of experience for the job application process? The hypothesis was; experience will be the most decisive factor in the decision if the applicant gets the job or not. The literary research showed that whilst life experience is of additional importance to the first impression, work experience is indeed of the most significant importance to the application process. From this can be concluded that the literary research confirmed the hypothesis.

To the question; what is the importance of competences and capacity for the job application process? The hypothesis was; competences and capacity are the most important

factor in an application after having been given the chance to gain experience. The literary research showed that because of the recent rise of competences management, the importance of competences and capacities in the job selection process has risen. However the literary research also shows that the importance of competences and capacity of an applicant is still inferior to the acquired experience the candidate has. Therefore the literary research confirms that the importance of competences and capacity is inferior to the importance of work-experience. However the literary research also contradicts the hypothesis in the way that the importance of competences and capacities has just recently become more significant.

To the question; what is the importance of the level of education for the job application process? The hypothesis was; the importance of the level of education will depend on the kind of job the application is for. The literary research showed that there are two separate sections to the level of education. The highest achieved educational level has the importance that this level has to match the level acquired for the job. The skills acquired by the applicant through education also have to match the skills needed for the job. From this can be derived that the literary research confirms the hypothesis.

To the question; what is the importance of personality traits for the job application process? The hypothesis was; the personality traits of the applicant will have to match the personality traits needed for the job. The literary research showed that this hypothesis is fully confirmed, for the importance of the personality traits is when they match with the personality traits needed for the job. The addition to the hypothesis is that the personality traits can be measured in three ways during the application procedure namely; the first impression, the interview and a personality trait test.

To the question; in what way does the first impression influence the job application process? The hypothesis was; the first impression is a very decisive factor in the job application process. The literary research concluded that the first impression is indeed one of the most decisive and influential factors in the job application process. The literary research thus confirms the hypothesis.

To the question; in what way does the motivation letter contribute to the job application process? The hypothesis was; the way in which the motivation letter is written is of key importance to the application. The literary research showed that the motivation letter is of critical importance to the job application. For the motivation letter is the basis on which the employer will invite the applicant or not. The literary research thus confirms the hypothesis.

Personality traits

To the question; to what extent is the first impression a good predictor of the personality traits of an applicant? The hypothesis was; a first impression will prove a good predictor of basic personality traits. The literary research showed that the first impression is not at all a good predictor of personality traits. This was because of a couple of characteristics of the first impression; the influence of stereotypes, the absence of a second

chance and the halo effect. Thus, the literary research contradicts the hypothesis. The experiment concluded that only 18.04% of the personality traits were accurately observed after seeing a picture 15 milliseconds and that 42.92% of the personality traits were scored at the correct level after seeing a video 30 seconds. This means that the results of the experiment also contradict the hypothesis.

The Experiment

The results of the experiment conclude that after seeing a person for 15 milliseconds 18.04% of the personality traits observed was correctly observed. Moreover only 16.32% of the total personality traits of the applicant were observed. After seeing a person for 30 seconds 42.92% of the personality traits were scored correctly, but only 15.54% of the personality traits of an applicant were scored correctly.

From this can be concluded that the committee in the experiment was somewhat able to observe the different personality traits correctly but they were not able to get a complete and correct image of the applicant.

Main conclusion

The main question was; to what extent does the first impression act as a prominent and decisive factor during a job application? The main hypothesis was; the first impression will prove itself to be the conclusive factor in determining whether an applicant will be hired or not. The first impression imprints itself into the brain of the employer and this image will remain a decisive factor in the conclusion to hire the applicant.

The literary research showed that the first impression will be made in the brain of a person and works as an assumption on how to act around the person. This means that the part of the hypothesis that says that the first impression will imprint itself in the brain of the employer is confirmed by the literary research that we conducted.

The literary research also showed that personality traits have an important and decisive role in the application process. Next to this the literary research also showed that the first impression makes assumptions to the personality traits of a person. So this combined means that the first impression serves as a prominent and decisive factor in the job application process, thus confirming that part of the hypothesis.

However the condition that has to be added to the hypothesis according to both the results of the literary research and the experiment that we carried out is that the results have shown that the first impression is not a reliable predictor of personality traits.

6. Discussion

Experiment

The difficulty in the showing of the picture of the applicants was that it was impossible to show a picture for only 15 milliseconds. Moreover, the length of time with which each picture of the applicants was shown could also differ, for that was hard to control. The longer display time meant that the first impression of 15 milliseconds was not measured solely. This difference in display time can perhaps explain the difference in results with some of the applicants. However it should be noted that this chance is minimal.

The difficulty in the showing of the video of the applicants was that in some cases the video stammered or the sound of the video suddenly malfunctioned. This meant that some of the videos had to be shown twice. As a result the time in which the application committee was shown the video was not fully controlled. This could possibly lead to untrustworthy results.

Another minor problem with the video was that the applicants were asked different questions during the interview. This could mean that they made a different impression on the application committee because they got to represent themselves in other ways.

There was also a minor problem with the questionnaires handed out. The questions asked are subjective, for the meaning of for example happiness can be interpreted in many ways. However the choice to use these types of questions was very conscious. This decision was made because the experiment had to test the exact same personality traits as the personality test taken by the applicants. Therefore the same designation was used for the measuring of the same personality trait. Where the test used happiness, the questionnaire also used happiness. This choice was mainly based on the subjectivity of the designations used in the personality test. These designations have such a high level of subjectivity that they could not simply be replaced by other designations, for this could mean that their meaning in the test would be contradicted.

The fact that official personality tests were taken by the applicants makes the experiment very trustworthy. The personality test that was taken by the applicants came from an official training agency that is specialised in analysing the personalities of their clients. The test used was the official Big Five test, which means that psychologists have certified the test. Furthermore, the test was interpreted by this agency as well, as a result the results gathered by the test are very trustworthy and valid.

The conditions created in the experiment were very controlled. By making a video of the applicants instead of letting the applicants interact with the application committee freely and in person, a more controlled environment was created. The applicants were shown in the same environment in the video. The scenario for the interview was also the same for each applicant. This eliminates some of the chances of contaminating the results, for a lot of variables were excluded from the video.

The fact that an authority figure led the interview meant that a more real interview was created. This means that the application committee could observe the applicant in an

interview instead of in a dialogue. As a result the results will be more valid for the first impression was measured during a real application interview.

Results

The problem with the results of the experiment is that the sample was too small. This means that the results of the experiment are neither trustworthy nor can they be generalised. The results are not trustworthy because no guarantees can be given that another experiment will show the same results. The results are not generalizable because no guarantees can be given that the results of this experiment will be the results for a larger sample of the population.

The results of the experiment are however valid. This is because the experiment had to measure whether or not a first impression was a good predictor of personality traits and the method used for the experiment measured the exact same thing.

Recommendations for further research

Our recommendation for further research is that the same experiment should be performed with a larger sample. Thereby the trustworthiness and the generalizability of the experiment can be measured. We recommend that further research is done to the topic because the results of this experiment could have an influence on application procedures. The conclusions drawn from this experiment point to the fact that an applicant should know what first impression he/she makes and base their behaviour in an application interview on the first impression they want to make. Further research could help in determining if this is really the case. Further research could also help determine the differences between the application committee, and for example answer questions like; why do the male committee members have a higher accuracy rate than the female committee members? Can a person with higher education level read the person in front of them better?

This could make the application procedure more fool proof. The chances of hiring a person that in the end proves not to be equipped for the job could in that way better be avoided.

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8. *Appendixes*

1. *Questionnaire with the picture*

2. *Questionnaire with the video*

3. *Excel sheets with the results of the picture*

4. *Excel sheets with the results of the video*

5. *Scenario for the video clip of the applicants*