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SELECTION BIAS OPERATING AGAINST SKILLED CANDIDATES FROM COUNTRIES-OF-ORIGIN OTHER THAN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

New Zealand is opening up its borders to attract skilled migrants to fill occupational shortages highlighted as important for New Zealand’s economic and social development. Despite highly skilled immigrants gaining residency, many are unable to secure employment in their area of expertise. This logjam suggests that there are specific human factors such as selection biases operating against candidates from certain countries in the New Zealand employment context. The issue of selection bias was addressed by examining the perceived similarity between country-of-origin to country-of-destination, and the perceived social dominance of country-of-origin vis-à-vis country-of-destination. Eighty Subject Matter Experts with approximately 10 years experience participating in/watching selection panels completed a scenario format that elicited their estimates of Human Resource and Line Managers’ selection preferences for jobs in twelve key occupations. Candidates were presented as coming from countries-of-origin that varied from Australia to Southern and South East Asian, Southern African, and Pacific Island nations, but were otherwise equally skilled, qualified for the given job, and costly to employ. Despite this equality of match to the job, there were significant biases for and against different countries-of-origin. Specifically, candidates from countries-of-origin perceived to be more similar to New Zealand, and candidates from countries-of-origin perceived to be socially dominant, were preferred over candidates from countries-of-origin less similar and subordinate. The discussion focuses on improving the methodology, and opening up the discussion field for future research.
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