HOW TO INSPIRE, RATHER THAN INSTRUCT, RECRUITERS TO SELECT DIVERSE ETHNICITIES

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Abstract: Recruiters often reject a candidate who belongs to another ethnic community. Arguably, initiatives that motivate people to develop capabilities, rather than prevent failures, might foster positive attitudes towards diverse communities. To asses this possibility, 198 participants read two job applications. The name of one applicant indicated this person belonged to a different ethnic community to the participants. Participants evaluated these applicants and then completed measures of goal orientation. Individuals who reported a motivation to develop capabilities expressed more favorable attitudes towards the person whom belonged to a different ethnic community. Arguably, recruiters and managers who are granted more time to develop their capabilities might not be as likely to discriminate against diverse ethnic communities.

Key words: Discrimination, Goal orientation, Openness to diversity, Recruitment, Tolerance

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INTRODUCTION

In many nations, job candidates cannot be excluded because of their ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation. Yet, many employees breach laws, policies, and regulations that prohibit discrimination (e.g., Dolton, O'Neill, & Sweetman, 1996; MacEwen, 1994; Makepeace, Paci, Joshi, & Dolton, 1999), mainly because of three reasons: First, when instructed to embrace diverse ethnic communities, managers and recruiters who belong to the dominant culture tend to respond defensively, as they strive to reinforce their status (e.g., Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2015). Consequently, they might feel resentment towards people who belong to other ethnicities. Second, individuals tend to underestimate their prejudices towards other cultures or demographics (Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015). Because of these unconscious biases, managers and recruiters inadvertently discriminate against people from diverse communities or constituencies. Third, after managers and recruiters employ one person who does not belong to the dominant culture, they feel they have demonstrated their integrity called moral credentials (Monin & Miller, 2001). Consequently, they later become more inclined to discriminate against other cultures or demographics.

Rather than depend solely on laws, policies, and regulations to prevent discrimination, organizations could explore other initiatives. To preclude defensive responses, managers and recruiters should not be explicitly directed to employ members of diverse communities (cf. Dover et al., 2015). Instead, organizations could, somehow, foster positive attitudes towards members of diverse communities, without frequent, explicit allusions to diversity.

This study provides some insight into how organizations can achieve this goal. In particular, as this study shows, when individuals in an organization are inspired to develop, rather than to demonstrate, their capabilities sometimes called a learning orientation (VandeWalle, 1997) they experience positive attitudes towards members of diverse communities.

Determinants of positive attitudes towards diverse communities

In recent years, many studies have explored the characteristics of individuals that increase the likelihood of positive attitudes towards diverse communities. Three key themes have emerged from this literature.
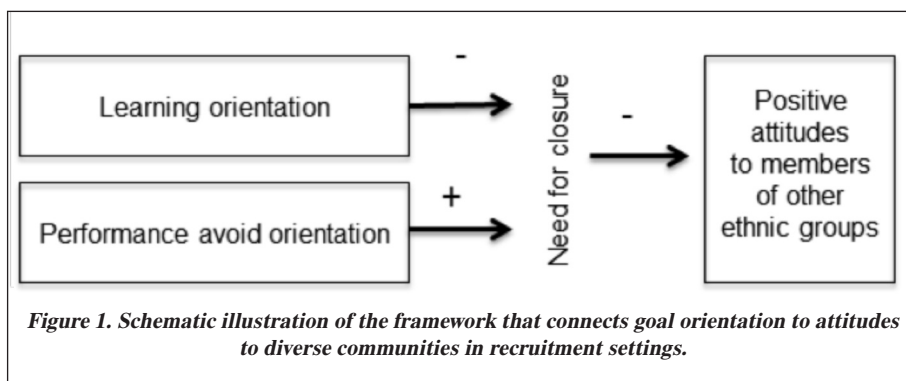
First, people who report an openness to experience –a personality trait that, for example, entails curiosity– develop positive attitudes towards diverse communities (e.g., Butrus & Witenberg, 2013; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2012). Second, people who tolerate, and even embrace, uncertain, unpre-

dictable, and ambiguous circumstances also develop positive attitudes towards diverse communities (Strauss, Connerley, & Ammermann, 2003). Third, people who report agreeableness –or related traits such as empathy, sympathy, understanding of other people and communities– also exhibit these positive attitudes (Butrus & Witenberg, 2013; Unruh & McCord, 2010).

In general, these determinants of positive attitudes towards diverse communities, such as openness to experience and agreeableness, are not especially modifiable. These traits tend to endure over time and persist across many circumstances and environments (e.g., Hampson & Goldberg, 2006).

However, one likely determinant of these attitudes towards diverse communities, namely goal orientation, is modifiable (Beck & Schmidt, 2013; Coad & Berry, 1998). Goal orientation refers to the degree to which individuals feel motivated to develop or to demonstrate their capabilities, including their knowledge, skills, and abilities. People who exhibit a learning orientation feel inspired to acquire, develop, and refine these capabilities (VandeWalle, 1997). People who exhibit a performance-approach orientation (Elliot, 1999) –sometimes called a performance-prove orientation (VandeWalle, 1997)– are motivated, instead, to demonstrate their capabilities and outperform their peers or surpass targets. In contrast, people who exhibit a performance-avoidance orientation (Elliot, 1999) –sometimes called a performance-avoid orientation (VandeWalle, 1997)– are motivated to conceal their shortcomings and prevent failures. Although these tendencies differ across individuals, many features of the social environment, such as the instructions of managers, can shape goal orientation (e.g., Coad & Berry, 1998).

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework to clarify how goal orientation might foster positive attitudes towards diverse communities. Specifically, according to goal orientation theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Senko, Hulleman, & Harackiewicz, 2011; VandeWalle, 1997), when individuals experience a learning orientation, they perceive

Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the framework that connects goal orientation to attitudes to diverse communities in recruitment settings.

challenging or uncertain circumstances as opportunities to develop (e.g., Stout & Dasgupta, 2013; VandeWalle, 1997); they may thus seek, rather than shun, unpredictable and uncertain settings.

In contrast, when individuals experience a performance-avoidance orientation, they are concerned that challenging or uncertain circumstances could uncover and accentuate their shortcomings (Stout & Dasgupta, 2013; VandeWalle, 1997). These individuals thus shun unpredictable or ambiguous settings. These observations imply that a learning orientation should be negatively, and a performance-avoidance orientation should be positively, associated with a need for closure defined as an aversion to uncertain, unpredictable, and ambiguous circumstances (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; for a similar argument, see Cury, Elliot, Sarrazin, Fonseca, & Rufo, 2002). A performance-approach orientation neither promotes nor inhibits this sense of challenge and, therefore, may not affect need for closure.

As many studies demonstrate, when people experience need for closure they tend to report unfavorable attitudes towards other cultures (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006). That is, individuals who shun uncertainty perceive other cultures as a source of unpredictable or erratic behavior (Kruglanski et al., 2006). Consequently, recruiters who experience a performance-avoidance orientation, instead of a learning orientation, and thus shun uncertainty should express more negative attitudes towards diverse communities.

Preliminary evidence vindicates this possibility. One study, conducted by Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, and Van Dierendonck (2013), examined the relationship between diversity of ethnicities in teams and performance on some assignments. When the members adopted a performance-avoidance orientation, diversity of ethnicities compromised performance. In contrast, when the members adopted a learning orientation, diversity of ethnicities enhanced performance. Nevertheless, this study did not explicitly examine whether goal orientation affects attitudes towards diverse communities.

Furthermore, past research has not verified the proposition that a learning orientation diminishes a need for closure. Admittedly, Velden, Beersma, and De Dreu (2009) did examine whether need for closure moderates the association between performance goal orientation and anxiety; however, this study did not assess learning orientation.

In contrast, the present study examined whether goal orientation affects evaluations of job candidates. In this study, the participants indicated whether their grandparents were from the American, European, or Australasian continents and were not indigenous to Australia and, hereafter, are referred to as Western individuals. These participants evaluated the attributes of two comparable applicants. However, the

name of one applicant was John Smith and thus Western, and the name of a second applicant was Ahmed Haroo and thus Arabic. Furthermore, participants completed measures of goal orientation and need for closure. According to the notion that goal orientation affects responses to uncertainty, and the motivation to shun uncertainty culminates in unfavorable attitudes towards diverse communities, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: A learning orientation should be positively, and a performance-avoidance orientation should be negatively, associated with favorable evaluations of the Arabic candidate.

Hypothesis 2: A learning orientation should be negatively, and a performance-avoidance orientation should be positively, associated with need for closure.

Hypothesis 3: Need for closure should be negatively associated with favorable evaluations of the Arabic candidate. Thus, need for closure should mediate the effect of goal orientation on the evaluation of the Arabic candidate but not necessarily of the Western candidate.

METHOD

Participants

To recruit participants, we utilized Microworkers, a crowdsourcing platform that is similar to Amazon Mechanical Turk but available worldwide. Crone and Williams (in press) demonstrated the suitability of this website to research in psychology. That is, when this website was used to recruit participants, the validity and distribution of psychological measures remained intact. The profile of participants was very similar to the profile of internet users in general on a range of characteristics, such as age, gender, and education.

The survey was available only to residents of nations in which English is the official language. In addition, towards the end of this survey, participants were asked to indicate the main nationality of their grandparents from a set of alternatives: Australian, New Zealander, Australian Aboriginal, East Asian or South East Asian, Indian subcontinent, Middle Eastern, North American, South American, African, European, or Other. Only participants who indicated their grandparents were Australian, New Zealander, North American, South American, or European were included in the final sample. These inclusion criteria were chosen to increase the probability that participants believed they are more likely to belong to the same ethnic group as John Smith than Ahmed Haroo.

Originally, 322 people began to complete the survey. Yet, seven of these participants did not complete all the measures and were thus excluded from the study. In addition, 23 participants completed the survey within 2.5 minutes, and nine participants could not complete the survey within 40 minutes; the responses of these participants were assumed to be unreliable and thus excluded from subsequent analyses. Finally, the responses of 95 participants who were not classified as Western were omitted.

The final set of 198 participants included 122 men and 76 women. The age ranged from 18 to 70 years, with a mean of 32 (SD = 10). Furthermore, 44% of participants had completed a university degree; 28% of participants had not completed any studies since high school. The majority of participants were European or North American (84%).

Materials

Resumés of candidates

Every participant read the same two resumés. These resumés were similar to each other: Both applicants had performed in the top quartile of their law degrees and had attained some business certificates. They had also both completed internships in law as well. Towards the top of each resumé was the name, home address, and email address of the individual. One applicant was called John Smith; the other applicant was called Ahmed Haroo. As a pilot study confirmed, these names were perceived by Australian residents as Western and Arabic respectively. A similar procedure has been utilized in past studies to assess biased attitudes towards other ethnicities or genders (e.g., Jackson, Esses, & Burris, 2001; Levinson & Young, 2010; for a comparable procedure to manipulate assumed ethnicity, see Clark et al., 2013).

Attitudes towards the candidates

Participants indicated which of these two candidates they would employ in a government policy role. Next, participants evaluated each participant on four attributes: academic record, work experience, strength of candidacy, and suitability for the role. A sample item is "John's academic record is strong". These items were adapted from a study conducted by Levinson and Young (2010).

Need for closure

Webster and Kruglanski (1994) developed a scale, comprising 42 items, to gauge need for closure. Haughton and Grewal (2000) developed and validated a shorter version, comprising only 20 items. Like the original scale, this version comprises five subscales: preference for order and structure (e.g., "I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament"), preference for predictability (e.g., "I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them"), decisiveness (e.g., "I tend to struggle with most decisions" (reverse scored), discomfort with ambiguity (e.g., "I feel uncomfortable when I do not understand the reason why an event occurred in my life"), and close-mindedness (e.g., "When thinking about a problem, I consider as many different opinions on the issue as possible").

Cronbach's alpha for these subscales resembled the psychometric properties of the original measure (Haughton & Grewal, 2000), ranging from .62 to .81. Confirmatory factor analysis, conducted by Haughton and Grewal (2000), generated GFI, CFI, and NNFI indices that exceeded .90 and a root mean square error of less than .05. Correlations between the subscales of the original scale and the corresponding subscales of this reduced scale ranged from .83 to .92. For this study, the subscales were aggregated to generate an overall measure of need for closure — a common practice in this field (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).

Goal orientation

To measure goal orientation, the work domain goal-orientation instrument, developed and substantiated by VandeWalle (1997), was administered. This instrument measures learning orientation (e.g., "I enjoy opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge"); performance prove orientation (e.g., " I like when other people at work, university, or school are aware of how well I am performing"); and performance avoid orientation (e.g., "Avoiding the embarrassment of failure is more important to me than learning a new skill"). These three subscales comprise five, four, and four items respectively. We adapted the items slightly to apply to work, university, or school.

Cronbach's alpha was .89, .85, and .88 for the three subscales respectively (VandeWalle, 1997). Test-retest correlation coefficients, when calculated over a three-month period, were .66, .60, and .57 for the three subscales (VandeWalle, 1997). Confirmatory factor analyses, conducted by VandeWalle (1997), verified the three factors are distinct, CFI = .99, GFI = .98.

Procedure

The participants were all users of Microworkers. When users access this website, an inventory of short jobs appears, such as proofreading a website or completing a survey. A short caption describes each job. For this study, the caption was "Survey: How Do You Judge People?" Anyone interested in this survey clicked the corresponding link, activating a series of instructions. Specifically, these individuals were instructed to copy and paste a URL into their browser. This URL activated a survey, hosted by Qualtrics (http://www.qualtrics.com).

The first page of this survey was a plain language statement. The plain language statement specified the rights of participants, such as their prerogative to withdraw at any time, as well as the aim of this study. In particular, to convey the aim, we included the paragraph "Managers often need to decide how to improve the workplace? They might, for example, need to decide... which job candidates to employ. This project is designed to examine how the practices and culture of an organization affect whether the changes are likely to be successful".

The survey included resumés of two job applicants, both seeking a role in government policy. Then, participants indicated which applicant they preferred before evaluating these individuals on academic record, work experience, strength of candidacy, and suitability for the role. Next, individuals completed measures of need for closure and goal orientation. Finally, the participants indicated their age, sex, level of education, and main nationality of their grandparents.

For every question, unless specified otherwise, participants indicated the degree to which they agree or disagree with each statement, on a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree unless specified otherwise. After completing the questionnaire, all participants received $1.00 US.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, range, and Cronbach's alpha of each measure, alongside the correlation between measures. For each measure, Cronbach's alpha exceeded .70 –and indeed exceeded .80 except for performance avoid orientation in which Cronbach's alpha was .77– indicating adequate levels of internal consistency (cf., Nunnally, 1978).

To assess whether need for closure mediates the association between a learning orientation and attitudes to the Arabic candidate, a PROCESS model, consistent with the algorithms that Preacher and Hayes (2008) advocated, was conducted. The

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations between the study variables
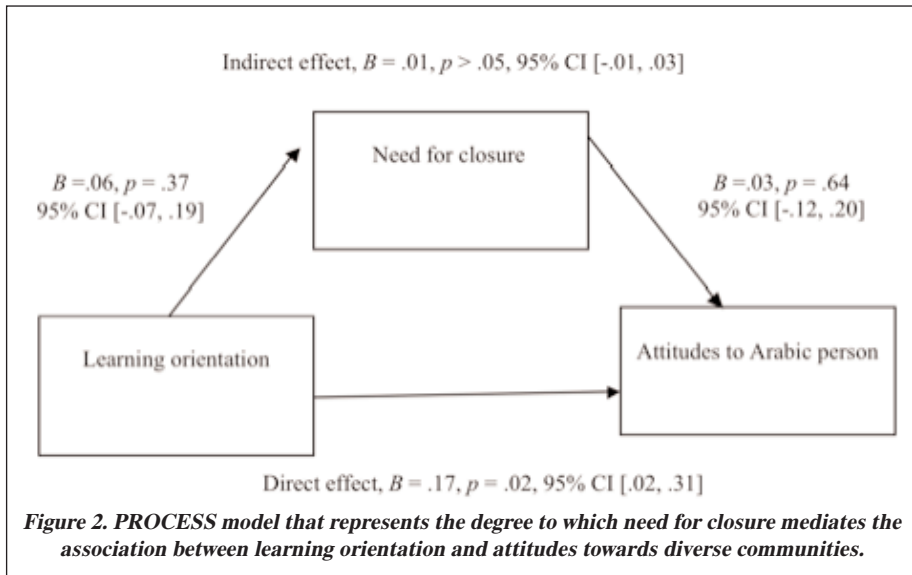
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Learning orientation	4.00	.75	*.85*						
2. Performance prove orientation	3.49	.76	.40**	*.77*					
3. Performance avoid orientation	2.90	1.01	-.27**	.17*	*.84*				
4. Need for closure	3.46	.64	.01	.21**	.48**	*.86*			
5. Attitudes to John	4.09	.73	.30**	.11	-.04	.06	*.84*		
6. Attitudes to Ahmed	4.01	.70	.27**	.05	-.08	.02	.46**	*.82*	
7. Choice of candidate	-	-	.09	.10	-.06	-.05	-.12	.45*	-

Note. Cronbach's alpha values (in italics) appear in the diagonal. For all measures, the possible range was 1 to 5.
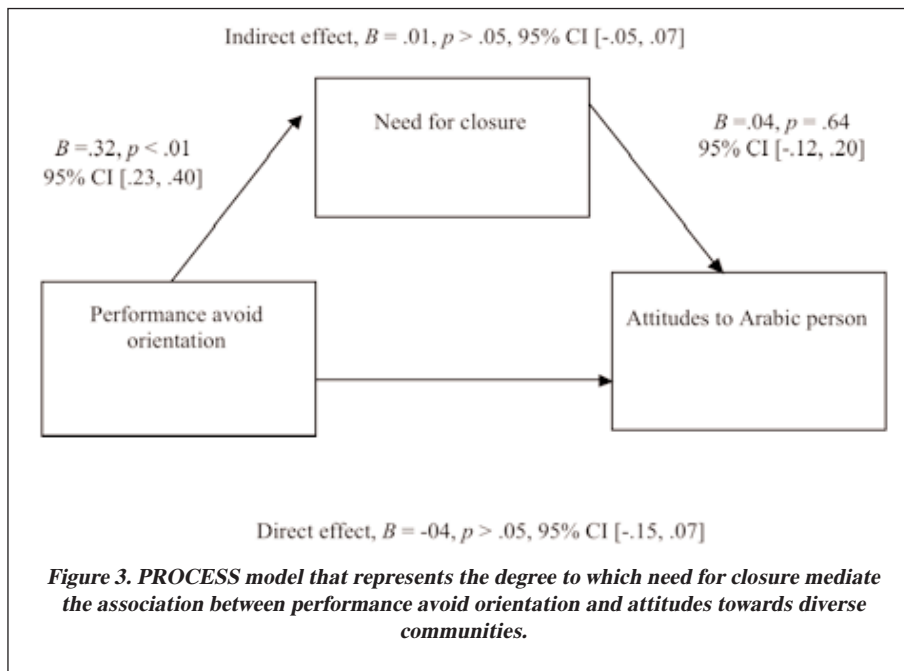
* p < .05, ** p < .01

PROCESS model is an algorithm that utilizes ordinary least square, bootstrapping, and Monte Carlo confidence intervals to estimate indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Specifically, the criterion variable was attitudes to the Arabic candidate. The mediator was need for closure, and the predictor was learning orientation. In addition, attitudes towards the other candidate were included as a control variable; thus, attitudes to the Arabic candidate actually indicates the degree to which attitudes depend on the Arabic name. Furthermore, age, sex, education, performance prove orientation, and performance avoid orientation were controlled too.

Figure 2 summarizes the output of this analysis. As this analysis shows, and consistent with Hypothesis 1, learning orientation was positively associated with attitudes

Figure 2. PROCESS model that represents the degree to which need for closure mediates the association between learning orientation and attitudes towards diverse communities.

towards the Arabic candidate. However, contrary to Hypotheses 2 and 3, need for closure was not significantly associated with either a learning orientation or attitudes towards the Arabic candidate. Therefore, the direct, but not indirect, effect of learning orientation was significant.

The second analysis was identical, except that performance avoid orientation was the criterion variable and learning orientation was a control variable. Figure 3 outlines the output of this analysis. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, performance avoid orientation was positively associated with need for closure. Yet, contrary to Hypotheses 1 and 3, neither performance avoid orientation nor need for closure were related to attitudes towards the Arabic candidate.

Indirect effect, $B = .01$, $p > .05$, 95% CI [-.05, .07]

Need for closure

$B = .32$, $p < .01$
95% CI [.23, .40]

$B = .04$, $p = .64$
95% CI [-.12, .20]

Performance avoid orientation

Attitudes to Arabic person

Direct effect, $B = -04$, $p > .05$, 95% CI [-.15, .07]

Figure 3. PROCESS model that represents the degree to which need for closure mediate the association between performance avoid orientation and attitudes towards diverse communities.

The third analysis was identical, except performance prove orientation was the criterion variable. However, performance prove orientation was not significantly associated with either need for closure or attitudes towards the Arabic applicant, $p > .05$ respectively.

Finally, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to ascertain whether the measures of goal orientation predict which applicant participants were selected, after controlling age, sex, and education. None of the subscales that measure goal orientation, however, were significantly associated with which applicant participants chose.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with goal orientation theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Senko et al., 2011), the motivation of individuals to learn and to develop capabilities –an orientation that managers and organizations can foster (Beck & Schmidt, 2013; Coad & Berry, 1998)– is likely to diminish unease with uncertain, unpredictable circumstances. That is, people who adopt this learning orientation might perceive these uncertain circumstances as opportunities to learn (Stout & Dasgupta, 2013). Without a pronounced need to seek certainty and closure, these individuals might be more willing to interact with members of foreign communities, unconcerned the practices of these communities might seem unpredictable and unfamiliar. Consequently, if organizations foster a learning orientation, recruiters might report positive attitudes towards diverse communities, diminishing the incidence of discrimination.

Some of the results of this study corroborate this account. Participants who reported a learning orientation expressed more positive attitude towards the Arabic applicant, after controlling attitudes towards the other applicant. Furthermore, participants who were motivated to avoid failure, rather than to develop capabilities, reported a greater need for closure and certainty.

These findings also align to the tenets of socio-emotional selectivity theory. According to this theory, proposed by Carstensen (1995), whenever individuals perceive their identity as stable –rather than fragile or limited in time– their primary motivation is to accrue knowledge, skills, and other resources that could benefit their future, comparable to a learning orientation. Their motivation to seek immediate pleasure subsides. Consequently, when motivated to accrue knowledge, skills, and other resources, individuals are not as inclined to bias their attention to information that evokes positive emotions (Carstensen, 1995). Therefore, their biases, such as their tendency to underestimate other communities, will tend to diminish. A learning orientation should thus curb biases and discrimination.

Nevertheless, need for closure was not associated with attitudes towards the Arabic applicant. One explanation is that people who experience a need for closure often reach decisions rapidly and prematurely (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). These individuals, therefore, might not have imagined themselves in the workplace, working with the applicant. This sense of detachment from the scenario might have nullified their usual suspicion of people who belong to other ethnic communities.

Other accounts could also explain the observed association between a learning orientation and attitudes towards the Arabic candidate. For example, people who adopt a learning orientation might perceive someone who belongs to another ethnicity as a better source of knowledge and insight than other candidates. Indeed, this

perception is accurate: People who interact with a diversity of communities are indeed more likely to develop more advanced cognitive skills (e.g., Hu & Kuh, 2003). Consequently, Western individuals who report a learning orientation might be especially motivated to interact with Arabic colleagues.

Goal orientation, however, did not significantly affect which candidate the participants chose. This finding implies that positive attitudes towards diverse communities –attitudes that tend to coincide with a learning orientation– may not always translate to selection decisions. That is, people who experience positive attitudes towards one candidate might choose another candidate instead. They might, for example, be concerned that an exceptional candidate could usurp their position and curtail their opportunities (for similar reasoning, see Luxen & Van der Vijver, 2006).

Nevertheless, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, because of cognitive dissonance, the evaluations of candidates could affect responses to the subsequent measures of goal orientation and need for closure. To illustrate, to prevent cognitive dissonance, if participants evaluate the Arabic candidate favorably, they might feel the need to justify this evaluation. They might, for example, underscore their motivation to learn from other cultures, manifesting as a learning orientation. Thus, their evaluations of this candidate could affect goal orientation rather than vice versa.

Second, participants might have discerned the purpose of the resumés. They might have realized these resumés are similar, besides the ethnicity of these candidates. Consequently, to conceal their prejudices, they might have shifted their evaluations of these candidates.

Two measures could be included to overcome these limitations. First, future studies could conduct a randomized control trial to confirm that initiatives, designed to promote a learning orientation, do indeed foster positive attitudes towards diverse communities (e.g., Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey, & Azam, 2005). These results would show that a learning orientation promotes attitudes towards diverse communities rather than vice versa.

Second, these studies should explore whether these initiatives do indeed increase the proportion of employees who belong to diverse communities. Ideally, the participants of these studies should be representative of recruiters.

Indeed, future studies could also assess whether experience in recruitment affects the association between goal orientation and attitudes towards diverse candidates. To illustrate, when individuals experience a sense of power, their personal inclinations are more likely to govern their decisions (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). Consequently, in experienced recruiters, goal orientation might be especially likely to determine attitudes towards diverse candidates.

In addition, because the sample was confined to Western individuals, the results might not generalize to non-Western individuals. Indeed, in many non-Western communities, individuals are especially likely to adopt a collective self-construal, in which they define themselves by their relationships or communities instead of their distinctive qualities and characteristics (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). When people adopt a collective self-construal, the norms of their community are more likely to govern their decisions and behaviors than are their personal attitudes or inclinations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Murray, Trudeau, & Schaller, 2011). Consequently, in non-Western communities, the goal orientation of individuals might not be as likely to shape their judgments of diverse candidates. Future research should thus examine whether or not the association between goal orientation and attitudes towards diverse candidates varies across communities.

In conclusion, laws, policies, and regulations that prohibit discrimination might evoke resentment towards diverse communities (Dover et al., 2015) and will not immediately redress unconscious biases (e.g., Perry et al., 2015). Instead, organizations should also consider initiatives that foster a learning orientation. For example, policies and practices that diminish the workload of recruiters (Beck & Schmidt, 2013), as well as leaders who promulgate an inspiring vision of the future (Coad & Berry, 1998), tend to promote this orientation and might thus curb the incidence of discrimination, seamlessly and sustainably.

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