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***Discrimination in hiring revisited: How firms use ethnicity and gender to avoid organisational troubles***

Going beyond economic and social psychological arguments to explain discrimination in hiring, this paper refers to compatible work of organisational studies and to a theory of justice to understand personnel selection. Hence the firm can be conceptualised as a social body of interweaved (industrial, domestic, market, civic etc.) worlds. To allow for the firm's further existence, each world tends to reproduce itself by claiming its own hiring principles of justice and of personnel valuation. Thus any promising candidate has to prove his/her industrial, domestic and market suitability in the selection process.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, the paper argues that the main selection logic in hiring is not to choose the most skilled candidate, but the one who suits best to avoid organisational troubles in multiple worlds. Discriminatory criteria as gender and ethnicity serve as symbolic resources for trouble expectations, especially in the domestic world of the firm. Trouble avoidance is seen to cause discrimination in hiring, not prejudices. But the latter serve to justify discriminatory hiring decisions.

Empirically, the paper refers to trainee selection in Switzerland as a special case of hiring: Using content and argumentation analysis, an interview-based investigation in 65 small and medium sized firms shows that firms take for granted to get into organisational troubles in various worlds by hiring students of specific ethnicity and gender. Options and limits for policy making on the municipality level to avoid social exclusion through non-discriminating hiring practices will be reconsidered.

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