

How Belonging to a Minority Group, Receiving a Hiring Decision and Getting Feedback on Test Results Affect the Intention to File a Complaint: The Mediating Role of Perceived Discrimination in Hiring

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Article abstract

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Abstract

Objective indicators, such as minority hiring rates or number of complaints, often fail to fully represent actual discrimination in hiring processes, particularly against racial and ethnic minorities (McGonagle et al., 2016). Despite legal efforts in Quebec to increase employment of minorities, their ongoing underrepresentation points to the need to examine discrimination in terms of perceived experiences. In line with Anderson (2011), we investigated perceived discrimination in hiring (PDH), its predictors and its effect on the intention to file a discrimination complaint, rather than solely considering actual complaints. Using a quasi-experimental design, we simulated a fictitious hiring process with 361 students from French-speaking Canadian universities. First, we confirmed the three dimensions of the recently developed PDH scale: differential treatment; breach of psychological contract; and non-competency-based assessment (Haecck-Pelletier, 2022). Second, using structural equation modelling (SEM), we found mediation effects: PDH scores were higher across all dimensions when a candidate belonged to a minority group, received a negative hiring decision or did not receive feedback on test results. However, only differential treatment predicted a candidate's intention to file a complaint. In addition to this first empirical test of Anderson's model, the results suggest that organizations should address perceptions of unfair treatment due to minority group membership by identifying and modifying

the practices that contribute to them. The eventual outcome would be a more representative workforce.

Keywords: discrimination; hiring; feedback; minority group; perception; decision

Résumé

Des lois canadiennes et québécoises offrent une protection contre la discrimination. Pourtant, le nombre de plaintes à l'embauche déposées par des membres de groupes minoritaires (ex. minorités visibles ou ethniques) ne cesse d'augmenter au fil des ans (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, 2022). Afin de mieux comprendre comment l'intention de poursuivre une organisation pour discrimination naît au cours d'un processus d'embauche et afin d'aider les organisations à prévenir cette situation, Anderson (2011) suggère de se concentrer sur ce qui pourrait affecter la perception de la discrimination à l'embauche (PDE) plutôt que de se concentrer uniquement sur les preuves objectives de discrimination (ex. différences dans les taux d'embauche en fonction de l'appartenance à un groupe). À l'aide d'une nouvelle échelle de PDE tridimensionnelle (c.-à-d. traitement différentiel, rupture de contrat psychologique et évaluation non fondée sur les compétences requises pour le poste, Haeck-Pelletier, 2022), cette étude fournit le premier test empirique du modèle d'Anderson (2011). Cette étude a été menée auprès de 361 étudiants d'universités canadiennes francophones qui ont participé à une procédure de sélection fictive basée sur un design quasi-expérimental. Après avoir validé la structure factorielle de l'échelle PDE par des analyses factorielles confirmatoires (AFC), les résultats d'équations structurelles montrent que les trois variables indépendantes sont associées à une PDH plus élevée. Plus précisément, le fait d'appartenir à un groupe minoritaire légalement protégé, de faire l'objet d'une décision d'embauche négative et de ne pas recevoir de retour sur cette décision augmente la PDE. En outre, seul la dimension Traitement différentiel de la PDE prédit l'intention de déposer une plainte. Les implications théoriques ainsi que les variables à ajouter lors d'une prochaine vérification du modèle sont proposées. Les implications pratiques pour les organisations visant à améliorer leurs pratiques d'embauche sont également mises en évidence.

1. Introduction

During selection of job candidates, those from ethnic¹ or visible² minority groups experience significant emotional responses to this high-stake situation, particularly if they are not selected. They may perceive the hiring process as discriminatory or unfair because of their group membership, and this perception may lead to potential legal challenges or their premature withdrawal from the process (Anderson, 2011; Barron et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2018; McGonagle et al., 2016; Salgado et al., 2017; Trouw.nl., 2011; Woods & Patterson, 2023). Such perceptions contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of minority groups in Quebec's workforce (Beaudry et al., 2019), despite the Government of Quebec's (2023) legislative efforts to promote equitable employment and hiring. Specifically, the objective is to increase the representation of ethnic and visible minorities in the provincial public sector to 18% by the end of 2023 (Government of Quebec, 2023), in line with local legislative objectives to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

In Quebec, the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (hereinafter, "Charter") is intended to protect minority groups from discrimination, as outlined in Article 10, with a particular focus on employment practices, as specified in Article 16. The Charter aims to promote their inclusion in the job market. To that end, numerous organizations (including those in the public sector) have introduced Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) programs over the past decade (Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission, 2023b) (hereinafter, "Commission"). The aim has been to bring about a representative workforce, while ensuring that the fundamental rights of members of protected groups are upheld in accordance with legislation, particularly throughout the hiring process (Commission, 2022a; Government of Quebec, 2023; Institut national de la recherche scientifique, 2024). When the right to a discrimination-free hiring process appears to have been violated, legal action is permitted by the Charter.

When researchers study complaints about discrimination in hiring, they encounter challenges due to the low number of formal complaints, which limits statistical analysis and the ability to take corrective action (Commission, 2023a; Goldman, 2001; McCarthy et al., 2017). This low number may, however, understate the real extent of discrimination (McCarthy et al., 2017). First, job candidates may prematurely withdraw from the hiring process because they feel discriminated against (Dhanani et al., 2017; Fournier, 2013). Second, they may avoid taking legal action because of the substantial time, effort and resources needed to file a complaint (Fournier, 2013; McGonagle et al., 2016). Thus, to improve EDI efforts and understanding of discrimination, researchers are shifting toward the intention to file a complaint as a more revealing measure of discrimination.

Because minorities are still underrepresented in Quebec organizations, researchers have been examining how minority groups perceive fairness in hiring (Dhanani et al., 2017; Gilliland, 1993; Greenen et al., 2012; Harold et al., 2016). Perceived unfairness negatively impacts job candidates through job offer rejection and eventual litigation (Dhanani et al., 2017; Harold et al., 2016; Schinkel et al., 2004) and organizations by hurting their reputation, image and sales (Dhanani et al., 2017; Goldman, 2001; James & Wooten, 2006; McCarthy et al., 2017; Schinkel et al., 2004). Because minority group members fear being stigmatized and receiving differential treatment (Dhanani et al., 2017; Foley & Kidder, 2002), they may see assessments as biased and withdraw from the hiring process in early stage (Dhanani et al., 2017; Fournier, 2013; Trouw.nl., 2011), even when legal protections are in place (Patterson & Zibarras, 2011).

McGonagle et al. (2016) distinguish between procedural justice, which is the general fairness of decision-making, and anticipated perceived discrimination, which is the "personal assessment of an unfair or biased act against an individual due to a stigmatized characteristic" (p. 64). Even if a

process appears objectively fair (e.g., uniform administration of tests for all candidates), candidates may still perceive discrimination, especially since some common methods of assessment (e.g., cognitive tests) are known to perpetuate or increase inequities (Woods & Patterson, 2023).

The traditional concept of justice does not fully capture all the nuances of perceived discrimination, which are crucial to understanding how minority groups become underrepresented in the workforce. Perceived discrimination might lead to the intention to file a complaint or an actual complaint, even in a fair hiring setting. In the current study, we investigate perceived discrimination in hiring (PDH) to explore the extent to which it influences the intention to file a complaint. We use Anderson's (2011) Model of Applicant Propensity to Case Initiation in Selection and the PDH scale (Haeck-Pelletier, 2022).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Brief Historical Review

Gilliland (1993) introduced a theoretical framework to understand how job candidates perceive fairness in hiring, with the focus being on procedural and distributive justice. Researchers have used Gilliland's framework to show that perceived unfairness negatively affects employers through job offer rejection (Gilliland, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2018), and job candidates through reduced self-esteem and satisfaction (Avery et al., 2008; Gilliland, 1993). However, such research often produces mixed results because there is no standardized scale to measure the degree of fairness (McCarthy et al., 2017), and because existing scales disregard fears of work-related stigmatization and discrimination (Dhanani et al., 2017). Since the workplace, especially during hiring, is prone to discrimination based on group membership, such discrimination should be considered in scales of hiring fairness (McGonagle et al., 2016). Current scales lack items that "include a referent for comparison or reference disparities in treatment" (McGonagle, 2016, p. 64), thus missing key aspects of fairness related to protected group disparities. As the legal demonstration of discrimination on a prohibited ground is essentially based on differences of treatment between minority and majority groups, this limitation highlights the need for better ways to capture such differences accurately in order to measure fairness in hiring, and the importance of a nuanced approach toward perceptions of justice by protected groups.

2.2 Perception of Discrimination in Hiring (PDH): Central Concept of the Model

PDH occurs when candidates feel differentially treated during the selection process because they belong to a legally defined minority group. Such situations create a perception of discrimination based on group membership (Anderson, 2011). This concept emphasizes the gap between expectations of legal fairness and actual experiences. As such, it is absent from traditional justice studies (Truxillo et al., 2009). PDH goes beyond "objective job discrimination" and is reported especially by candidates who are not selected (Anderson, 2011; McGonagle et al., 2016). It persists even when an organization demonstrates the objective fairness of its hiring practices, thus diverging from traditional assessment of fairness in the hiring process (Dhanani et al., 2017). By exploring PDH's predictors and mediators, we may better understand its consequences, such as the intention to file a complaint, and address the shortcomings of traditional scales of fairness in hiring.

In light of the above, Haeck-Pelletier (2022) developed a PDH scale through exploratory factor analysis (EFA). This scale has three components: differential treatment (DT) ($\alpha = 0.81$); breach of psychological contract (PC) ($\alpha = 0.80$); and non-competency based assessment (CO) ($\alpha = 0.78$). Convergent validity with distributive and procedural justice dimensions showed that PDH is a distinct construct (Haeck-Pelletier, 2022). These findings support Anderson's (2011) assertion that

PDH is related to, yet separate from, perceptions of procedural and distributive justice (Gilliland, 1993; 1994; Steiner & Gilliland, 2001). It measures subjective perceptions of differential treatment based on group membership, even when there is no objective evidence of discrimination. Here, we use the PDH scale to explore aspects of Anderson's (2011) model.

PDH may vary throughout the hiring process, in line with its predictors, and impact the candidate's future intentions and behaviours (Anderson, 2011). There is still much to learn about how various factors influence PDH and its impact during and after the hiring process (Patterson & Zibarras, 2011).

2.3 Predictors of PDH

Building on previous studies of justice in the context of hiring, the Model outlines predictors of PDH, and three were selected for this study: minority group membership; hiring decision; and feedback on test results.

2.3.1 Minority Group Membership

Foyle and Kidder (2002) pointed to a gap in management research on models that address racial differences. Anderson (2011) created a model to fill this gap by grounding itself in the legal definition of groups (specifically minority group membership) that requires group comparisons (Anderson, 2011). Such a model is essential for examination of perceived unfair treatment and discrimination, as legal definitions of discrimination involve group membership and require assessing differential treatment between majority and protected visible and ethnic groups.

Given the history of discrimination against certain groups, it is plausible that participation in a hiring process could give rise to perceptions or fears of discrimination (Anderson, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2017). These perceptions persist despite legislative efforts to disrupt the cycle of discrimination across various areas of life, including employment (Commission, 2022b).

Belonging to a minority group may influence the job applicant's perceptions of the assessment methods and/or the selection process (Harold et al., 2016; Woods & Patterson, 2023). For instance, individuals from the Minority group may view the use of a cognitive test as not job-related and discriminatory based on historical evidence (Woods & Patterson, 2023), thus perceiving it as unfair treatment (Anderson, 2011; McGonagle et al., 2016; Patterson & Zibarras, 2011). Members of a minority group may also fear that their protected status could perpetuate rather than mitigate discrimination, a fear not shared by the majority.

In Anderson's model, Minority group serves as an antecedent to PDH. Consequently, it is hypothesized that membership in a minority group correlates with higher scores on the dimensions of PDH (DT, PC and CO), and membership in the majority with lower scores on the dimensions of PDH (Hypothesis 1; H1).

2.3.2 Hiring Decision

The hiring decision may give rise to negative perceptions of the selection process (Avery et al., 2008; Gilliland, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2017; Ployhart et al., 2005; Schinkel, 2004; Truxillo et al., 2002). A successful candidate may view the process as fair, even when it is not, while a rejected candidate might perceive it as unfair, even when it is not (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). However, even successful candidates may perceive unfair treatment of candidates and call for investigation into perceptions, rather than solely into fairness as measured by objective data. A candidate will not perceive bias following a decision largely to the extent that the decision is perceived as job-relevant and competency-based (Ployhart et al., 2005; Weiner, 1985). Until now, the impact of the

hiring decision on PDH has been overlooked. We propose that a negative decision will result in higher PDH scores (DT, PC and CO), and a positive decision in lower PDH scores (Hypothesis 2; H2).

2.3.3 Test-Result Feedback

Feedback helps improve the candidate experience (McCarthy et al., 2018). It can positively impact the candidate's reactions, especially after a negative decision (Truxillo et al., 2009). If the hiring procedures and outcomes are explained, candidates will consider situational factors they might have overlooked in their initial analyses of procedural fairness (Ployhart & Harold, 2004; Ployhart et al., 2005). This holds particularly true for unsuccessful candidates, who are motivated to understand the reasons for the decision by drawing on available information (Greenberg, 2001). Consequently, feedback helps candidates comprehend the reasons, and thus influences PDH (Truxillo et al., 2009). Moreover, as McCarthy et al. (2017) suggest, feedback is associated with perceptions of justice and, presumably, PDH. Receiving feedback should thus be associated with lower PDH (DT, PC, and CO), and not receiving feedback with higher PDH (Hypothesis 3; H3).

2.3.4 Minority Group Membership x Hiring Decision x Test-Result Feedback

Studies suggest that post-decision feedback influences perceptions of justice, particularly if the decision is negative (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Shaw et al., 2003; Truxillo et al., 2009). This finding implies direct effects on PDH from the hiring decision and from test-result feedback, as well as potential interactions. When cognitive tests are part of the hiring process, a minority group may expect discrimination, especially if the tests lead to a negative decision (Woods & Patterson, 2023). There may thus be interaction between the hiring decision and membership in a minority group. McCarthy et al. (2018) found that feedback positively affects all of the candidates, an indication of a direct feedback effect on PDH. It is still unclear how minority group membership, hiring decision and test-result feedback may interact to influence PDH. This possible interaction remains understudied (Dhanani et al., 2017). We will thus explore such interactions among these PDH antecedents (Hypothesis 4; H4).

2.3.5 Intention to File a Complaint

The hiring process can sometimes result in discrimination lawsuits (Anderson, 2011). During the 2022-2023 period, the Commission reported that 63 of the 222 complaints it handled were due to racial or ethnic discrimination, concerned violations of Charter rights and occurred in the workplace (Commission, 2023a). Of these complaints, 13 were specifically related to the hiring process—an apparently low number of formal complaints. However, this number may not fully show the true extent of discrimination (McCarthy et al., 2017). Despite recent initiatives by the Government of Quebec to establish hiring targets for minority groups and their relatively low unemployment rates due to favourable legal frameworks (Commission, 2023a, 2023b), discrimination does persist without necessarily leading to formal complaints (McGonagle et al., 2016). Therefore, the number of formal complaints may not fully indicate the extent of discriminatory hiring practices.

By preventing PDH, we not only reduce the costs of formal discrimination complaints but also improve protections for minority groups, increase their employment and help achieve EDI objectives (Anderson, 2011). Clearly, there is a gap between the objective procedures of the hiring process and the subjective experiences of the job candidates. For example, Cropanzano et al. (2005) note that individuals from visible minorities assess how fairly they are treated by an organization before forming an opinion on its attractiveness. Other researchers cite the withdrawal of candidates from the hiring process for fear of discrimination as a key reason for focusing on measuring intent rather than the number of actual complaints (McGonagle et al., 2016; Patterson & Zibarras, 2011). As intentions strongly predict actions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), Truxillo et al. (2009)

and Anderson (2011) propose using the intention to file a complaint as a proxy for discrimination, rather than relying on empirical evidence of actual discrimination. Therefore, in Anderson's model, the intention to complain is explained by PDH (Anderson, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2017). A higher PDH (DT, PC, CO) is therefore believed to be positively associated with a greater intention to file a complaint (Hypothesis 5; H5).

In sum, Anderson's model posits that minority group membership, the hiring decision and test-result feedback are antecedents to PDH, which then predicts the intention to file a complaint. Overall, the model assumes that belonging to a minority group, receiving a negative decision and/or not getting feedback on test results will increase PDH scores, which, in turn, will increase the intention to file a complaint. PDH thus seems to mediate the relationship between the independent variables and the intention to file a complaint (Hypothesis 6; H6).

Previously, PDH relationships remained theoretical for lack of a validated measure. We can now test them by using a newly validated PDH scale (Haeck-Pelletier, 2022).

3. Method

3.1 Procedure

A quasi-experimental design with three measurement times was used (Table 1). After obtaining their consent, the participants were presented with a fictional scenario and asked to envision themselves as job candidates for a human resources consultant position in an organization that practises EDI (as stated in a sentence on the first page of the questionnaire). The experiment began with a socio-demographic questionnaire, an aptitude test and a personality inventory, and the PDH scale (T1). To increase the experiment's credibility, four research assistants (i.e., master's students in human resources management under the main researcher's supervision) left the room after T1 with the completed tests. Following a brief delay (approximately ten minutes), they returned and discussed briefly with the person in charge of administering the tests (i.e., likewise a graduate student, the fifth research assistant, who stayed in the room throughout the data collection). After this "deliberation" period, the participants were informed of the hiring decision, which was the same for all the participants in each room, and which they received in writing on a separate sheet of paper from a research assistant, who called out each participant's name. Fifteen minutes later, the participants completed the PDH scale again, and the ones in the no-feedback condition also filled out the Intention to File a Complaint scale (T2). For the ones in the no-feedback condition, the experiment ended at this point, in line with typical organizational practice (Gauthier & Bourgeois, 2016).

The participants in the feedback condition received feedback on the fictitious test results in writing from a research assistant. They then completed the PDH scale and the Intention to File a Complaint scale (T3). To streamline the procedure, there was one experimental condition per room, with the aim of ensuring balanced sample sizes across the conditions.

Table 1

Design of the Study and Measures Administered Chronologically

	Measures	Hiring decision and no feedback	Hiring decision with feedback
Time 1 (T1)	Socio-demographics	√	√
	Psychometric tests	√	√
	PDH scale	√	√
Time 2 (T2)	PDH scale	√	
	Intention to file a complaint	√	
Time 3 (T3)	PDH scale		√
	Intention to file a complaint		√

Note. √ = Measures used.

3.2 Participants

At T1 and T2, there were 361 participants, primarily women (77%). All of them were undergraduate students who worked an average of 27.07 hours per week ($SD = 10.27$ hours), with 50% attending evening courses. The participants were 27.95 years old on average ($SD = 7.24$ years), they came from two Canadian universities and 38% of them ($n = 137$) belonged to a protected minority. At T3, 245 questionnaires were collected from approximately two thirds of the initial participants, since the participants from the no-feedback condition completed the PDH scale at a different time (Table 2). Given the study's objective to examine the responses of visible and ethnic minorities to various selection decisions and feedback, and due to insufficient numbers in each minority group for separate analysis, these groups were combined into a variable called 'minority group,' in line with prior research (Hirsh & Lyons, 2010; Stainback & Irvin, 2012).

Table 2

Distribution of Participants by Socio-Demographic Category and by Measurement Time

	T1	T2 After Decision	T3 After Feedback
<i>n</i>	361	361	245
Women	278 (78%)	278 (78%)	180 (74%)
Men	79 (22%)	79 (22%)	62 (26%)
<i>M_{Age}</i>	27.95 years	27.95 years	27.6 years
<i>SD</i>	7.24	7.24	7.18
Minority Group	137 (38%)	137 (38%)	91 (37%)

Note. At T1 and T2, 1.1% of the gender data was missing. At T3, 1.2% was missing.

For the analysis, we divided the participants into two distinct groups: 1) Caucasian individuals; and 2) individuals identifying with one of the Charter-defined groups (i.e., visible or ethnic minorities). Both groups had men and women.

3.3 Measures

Perceived Discrimination in Hiring (PDH; Haeck-Pelletier, 2022). This scale has three dimensions: 1) non-competency based assessment (CO), i.e., the extent to which one's evaluation is perceived as not being based solely on competencies (e.g., *"I am confident that my scores will reflect my real performance on selection tools only,"* $\alpha = 0.83$); 2) breach of psychological contract (PC), i.e., the extent to which one's evaluation is perceived as being aligned with the employer's anti-discrimination policies (e.g., *"During its hiring process, I believe that the organization will respect what it publicly advocates regarding equal access to employment,"* $\alpha = 0.78$); and 3) differential treatment (DT), i.e., the extent to which one's treatment is perceived as being based on group membership (e.g., *"I believe I may witness differential treatment regarding the hiring decision on my application compared to the treatment of others,"* $\alpha = 0.85$). The participants indicated their level of agreement on a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Intention to File a Complaint. This scale had four statements to be answered on a Likert-type scale, where 1 corresponds to *"not at all"* and 5 to *"extremely"*. For example, *"Considering the fictitious situation presented to you, if it had been a real selection process, to what extent would you consider complaining about the employer for having discriminated in employment on a ground prohibited by law?"* ($\alpha = 0.95$).

3.4 Data Analysis

To harmonize the data analysis, all of the PDH items were recoded so that scores of 1 would refer to a fairer procedure. Before doing structural equation modelling (SEM) for our model, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the PDH scale using AMOS software (version 28.0) and the Maximum Likelihood method. Subsequently, we conducted ANOVAs independently for each PDH dimension, treating them as dependent variables and the experimental manipulations (i.e., minority group membership, hiring decision and test-result feedback) as independent variables. The aim was to identify the direct effects of the independent variables on each PDH dimension and any possible interactions among them. Finally, SEM analyses were employed to assess PDH's role as a mediator. We used goodness-of-fit indices, including χ^2 , $\Delta \chi^2$, GFI, RMR, CFI, AIC, RMSEA and their 90% confidence intervals, to assess how well the model fits the data.

4. Results

4.1 PDH Factor Structure

Prior to the CFA, we checked and confirmed the normality of the data distribution for the three PDH dimensions. Descriptive statistics (Table 3) show that the data were normally distributed at all three measurement times (Field, 2018).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Each PDH Dimension at Each Measurement Time

Variables	N	M	Median	Mode	SD	Kurtosis (SE)	Skewness (SE)
DT (T1)	361	4.03	4.00	4.00	1.42	-.46 (.26)	-.08 (.13)
DT (T2)	361	3.63	3.67	2.00	1.36	-.43 (.26)	.22 (.13)
DT (T3)	245	3.30	3.40	2.00	1.28	-.37 (.31)	.15 (.16)
PC (T1)	361	3.01	3.00	2.00	1.20	.12 (.26)	.52 (.13)
PC (T2)	361	3.28	3.33	4.00	1.22	-.08 (.26)	.31 (.13)
PC (T3)	245	3.27	3.26	4.00	1.18	.17 (.31)	.25 (.16)
CO (T1)	361	3.45	3.33	4.00	1.30	.26 (.26)	.48 (.13)
CO (T2)	361	3.65	3.67	4.00	1.38	-.51 (.26)	.16 (.13)
CO (T3)	245	3.77	3.77	3.77	1.41	-.56 (.31)	.17(.16)

Note. DT = differential treatment; PC = breach of psychological contract; CO = non-competency based assessment.

The CFA analysis indicated a better fit for the three-dimensional PDH scale, as shown in Table 4. Goodness-of-fit criteria included: 1) a non-significant χ^2 close to its degrees of freedom (Byrne, 2012); 2) a GFI close to 1 (Byrne, 2012); 3) an RMR close to 0 (Kline, 2016); 4) an AIC favouring the model with the lowest value (Byrne, 2012); 5) a CFI and a GFI exceeding 0.90 (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonett, 1980); 6) an RMSEA below 0.08 (Steiger, 1990); and 7) an RMSEA 90% confidence interval upper limit not exceeding 0.10 (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). These thresholds support the superiority of the three-dimensional PDH structure, as confirmed by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Each PDH Dimension at Each Measurement Time

Number of dimensions	Model	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta \chi^2$	GFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA 90% CI	AIC
3	Theoretical	74.4 (24)		.957	.968	.103	.076 [.057; .096]	116.4
2	DT + PC/CO	187.2 (26)	112.8**	.883	.899	.145	.131 [.114; .149]	225.2
2	PC + CO/DT	179.9 (26)	105.5**	.886	.904	.155	.128 [.111; .146]	217.9
2	DT + CO/PC	262.8 (26)	188.4**	.826	.852	.193	.159 [.142; .177]	300.8
1	DT + PC + CO	319.4 (27)	245.0**	.809	.817	.204	.173 [.157; .191]	355.4

Note. Comparisons with the theoretical model significant at $p < 0.001$. Combined dimensions/Only one dimension. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

4.2 Interaction Effects of the Independent Variables

After analyzing the PDH scale in terms of its psychometric properties, we tested for interaction effects in an exploratory way for each of the dimensions (Hypothesis 4). The ANOVA results are presented in Table 5. As each of the independent variables had only two groups, post-hoc tests were not required.

Table 5

ANOVAs for Each PDH Dimension

Effect	DT		PC		CO	
	F	n ²	F	n ²	F	n ²
Constant	2236.275**	.864	2488.161**	.876	2265.211**	.865
Minority group (G)	20.95**	.056	12.457**	.034	2.611	.007
Decision (D)	8.157**	.023	20.309**	.054	23.292**	.062
Feedback (F)	5.689**	.016	.068	.000	.056	.000
G*D	.833	.002	.705	.002	.466	.001
G*F	2.920	.008	1.073	.003	.072	.000
D*F	2.105	.006	.089	.000	.352	.001
G*D*F	.077	.000	.224	.001	.905	.003

Note. Minority group (G): (0 = Caucasian; 1 = Visible/Ethnic minority); Decision (D) (0 = Rejected, 1 = Accepted); Feedback (F): (0 = None, 1 = Feedback). * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The results show no significant interaction effects, but the main effects of each dimension are observable.

Minority group members perceived that they were significantly more subjected to DT than were majority group members ($M_{\text{minority}} = 3.78$; $SD = 1.35$ versus $M_{\text{Majority}} = 3.17$; $SD = 1.27$ respectively). The same phenomenon was also observed for the PC dimension ($M_{\text{minority}} = 3.55$; $SD = 1.17$ versus $M_{\text{majority}} = 3.08$; $SD = 1.16$). No difference was found for the CO dimension.

When the participants had their fictitious applications rejected, they systematically perceived more discrimination (i.e., higher score) in the process than did those whose applications had been accepted; this was observed for all three dimensions of PDH (DT: $M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.58$; $SD = 1.36$ versus $M_{\text{accepted}} = 3.22$; $SD = 1.29$; PC: $M_{\text{rejected}} = 3.55$; $SD = 1.23$ versus $M_{\text{accepted}} = 2.98$; $SD = 1.08$; CO: $M_{\text{rejected}} = 4.20$; $SD = 1.36$ versus $M_{\text{accepted}} = 3.37$; $SD = 1.38$).

Finally, a significant effect was found for the feedback variable. Among those candidates who received no feedback on test results, the perception of DT was higher than among those who did receive feedback ($M_{\text{no-feedback}} = 3.62$; $SD = 1.41$ versus $M_{\text{feedback}} = 3.30$; $SD = 1.28$). No difference was found for the PC and CO dimensions.

4.3 Empirical Test of the Model

SEMs were carried out to predict the intention to file a complaint. Figure 1 presents the variables and results for Hypotheses 1 through 6 (H1 to H6, excluding H4, tested with ANOVAs).

Figure 1

SEM Results for Partial Test of Anderson's (2011) Model

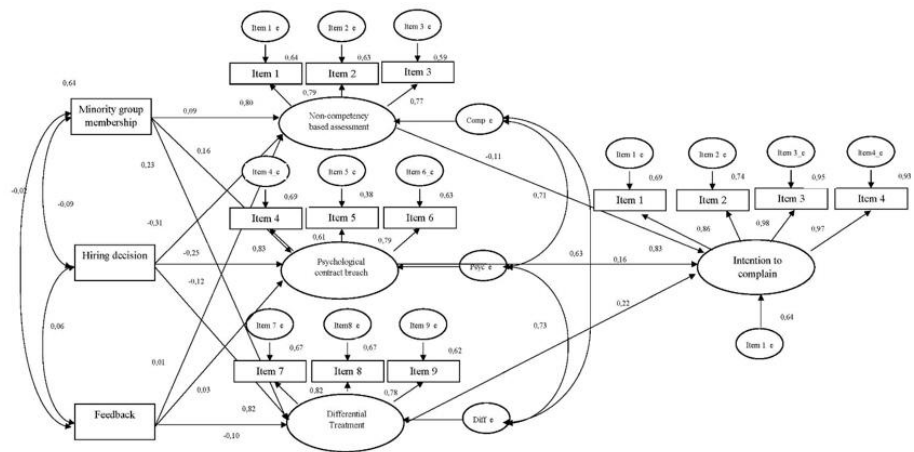


Table 6

Standardized Beta Results for Each Path Analysis, Using the Maximum Likelihood Method

Model	χ^2 (df)	GFI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA	AIC
90% CI						
Theoretical model	253.498** (89)	.920	.952	.079	.072 [.061;.082]	347.498

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 7

Standardized Beta Results for Each Path Analysis, Using the Maximum Likelihood Method

Effect	DT	PC	CO
From minority group to PDH	.23**	.16**	.09
From decision to PDH	-.12*	-.26**	-.32**
From feedback to PDH	-.10 ($p = .06$)	.03	.01
From PDH to intention to complain	.22*	.16	-.11
Indirect effects on intention to complain via PDH dimensions			
Minority membership	.07**		
Decision	-.03		
Feedback	-.02		

Note. The first column provides the beta coefficient of the basic theoretical model. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The SEM results indicate a positive association between minority group membership, and two of the PDH dimensions, DT and PC, thus aligning with the ANOVA results and partially confirming H1. Regarding H2, the hiring decision shows a significant negative association with all three dimensions of PDH, thus confirming the hypothesis, since rejection is associated with higher levels of PDH. Contrary to what H3 predicts, test-result feedback fails to show a significant association with the PDH dimensions. The SEM analysis, which more rigorously tests H5, partially supports it, with only the DT dimension showing a significant positive association with the intention to file a complaint. Lastly, the mediation hypothesis is partially confirmed, with an indirect effect primarily explained by the impact of minority group membership on the DT dimension of PDH.

5. Discussion

In this study, we sought to test Anderson's Model, specifically how three variables influence perceived discrimination in hiring (PDH) and the intention to file a complaint. Our research design was longitudinal and quasi-experimental. In the next section, we will discuss our findings, their theoretical and practical implications and the potential avenues for future research.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

5.1.1 Partial Test of Anderson's Model

Our model has three independent variables (minority group membership, hiring decision, test-result feedback), three mediators (the three dimensions of PDH) and one dependent variable (intention to file a complaint), thus making it a partial test of a larger model.

Although minority group membership is linked to perceptions of differential treatment (DT) and breach of psychological contract (PC), only differential treatment influenced the intention to file a complaint. The participants thus considered filing a complaint primarily when they felt they had been treated differently from the majority group. This finding shows the relevance of PDH to perceptions of justice, specifically the importance of how one's group is treated in comparison to other groups in the hiring process. It also shows the need to distinguish between subjective feelings of discrimination, as measured by perceived differential treatment, and objective data on actual discrimination. If this distinction is ignored, the result could be wrong conclusions and misguided efforts. It is thus necessary to investigate why minority groups feel discriminated against and how this feeling can be addressed to reduce the intention to file a complaint.

The hiring decision is the second variable that influences PDH. An unfavourable decision can lead to a perception that one's group is being differentially treated (DT), that the assessment is not based on job-related competencies (CO) and that the psychological contract has been breached (PC). According to Patterson and Zibarras (2011), PDH influences the intention to file a complaint. In our study, however, this intention was driven only by the DT dimension of PDH, and not by the other two dimensions. PDH is thus a complex entity, whose dimensions have variable effects, notably on perceptions of justice (Dhanani et al., 2017). This finding provides insight into what organizations can do to limit the effects of a negative hiring decision on PDH. Some methods (e.g., simulations) might help candidates feel that they have been fairly evaluated on their ability to perform the job, regardless of their minority group membership (Pettersen & Durivage, 2006). However, complex selection processes including simulation methods can represent significant organizational investment warranting further research.

The SEM results show that lack of feedback on test results does not lead to a stronger perception of unfair treatment, despite a nearly significant association between feedback and perception of differential treatment. On the other hand, the ANOVA results show that feedback does have a significant effect. This inconclusive finding contrasts with those of prior studies, which have found that feedback does have a positive effect (McCarthy et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2018). The authors acknowledge the need for additional research with different designs to explain these results. In our study, feedback was provided within a short timeframe, which perhaps made the participants question its sincerity and relevance. A similar study with longer intervals between experimental manipulations could provide insights into these contradictory findings.

Finally, the ANOVAs show significant direct effects from all three independent variables, with non-significant interactions. This finding is a partial response to Dhanani et al. (2017), who called for research on moderation and mediation effects of variables that may be associated with workplace discrimination.

5.2 Practical Implications

First, to address the potential impact of minority group membership, a job candidate could be offered practice tests to alleviate any anxiety or fear, especially if that person has already suffered discriminatory experiences. This approach may foster a positive view of the employer's organization and its commitment to the implied psychological contract outlined in the Charter (e.g.,

the right to be protected against discrimination). Transparency is crucial to improving the candidate's perceptions of recruitment practices (McCarthy et al., 2018).

Second, given the selective nature of the hiring process, we cannot fully eliminate PDH. The hiring process should instead be modified to mitigate the influence of PDH on the candidate's intention to file a complaint in the event of rejection. PDH (and especially DT) may be reduced if rejected candidates are allowed to retest for another job offer or are added to a "candidate pool".

Third, it may be worthwhile to investigate how feedback is delivered to the candidate. Ore and Sposato (2022) found that applicants prefer in-person feedback, while McCarty et al. (2018) suggested that verbal feedback from an organization member could positively influence the candidate's perceptions. Currently, feedback is delivered rapidly, in writing and in an automated manner (Konradt et al., 2013). Further research is needed to understand how different feedback formats affect PDH and the Intention to file, guiding future feedback practices in organizations.

5.3 Limitations

Our study has some limitations. First, the whole experiment took place during a single class period—a short timeframe that may have limited the credibility of the experimental manipulations. Nevertheless, PDH scores differed significantly between measurement times despite much variability in the responses (i.e., standard deviations greater than 1.25).

Evaluating a theoretical model in a real-world context poses methodological challenges, particularly when a simulated hiring process is used for research purposes (McCarthy et al., 2017). In our quasi-experimental design, we addressed some of these challenges by assessing how PDH is influenced by providing or not providing feedback. Because this approach resulted in a significant loss of participants, we recommend varying feedback format rather than using a no-feedback condition. To improve the generalizability of our findings, it would be useful to separate the hiring decision from the feedback. For instance, in a multi-stage hiring process, feedback on test results could be delivered before the candidate receives the hiring decision, in order to clarify the distinct effects of each stage on PDH. Future researchers could use latent growth modelling to investigate how each PDH dimension varies through each stage of the process and the ensuing reactions. Such research could inform strategies to reduce negative perceptions and ultimately to promote a more diverse workforce.

In our sample, women and men were grouped together because sex did not significantly impact the intention to file a complaint. Nor were there any significant sex differences for each PDH dimension. By grouping women and men together, we were able to achieve comparable sample sizes. Future researchers should investigate gender rather than sex, since gender-based discrimination can elicit distinct stereotypes that lead to different outcomes (Schaerer et al., 2023; Stainback & Irvin, 2012; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004).

Finally, McCarthy et al. (2017) proposed an integrated model to explain how job candidates respond to the hiring process, particularly their perceptions. We have taken a first step in this direction, and future researchers could incorporate the PDH scale when testing the model proposed by McCarthy et al. (2017). Such research would show the importance of PDH in relation to justice-related factors and the distinct effects of its three dimensions on various outcomes.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we used the PDH scale within Anderson's model to predict the intention to file a complaint. Given that PDH concerns legally protected minority groups (visible and ethnic) regardless of their country of origin, we strongly recommend that the PDH scale be used and validated in other national contexts. Though partial, our initial empirical test of Anderson's model should provide a basis for future testing of the full model.

Notes

[1] "Non-[Indigenous] people and non-members of a visible minority whose mother language is neither French nor English" (Government of Quebec, 2023, p.5).

[2] "People other than [Indigenous], who are non-white or non-white-skinned" (Government of Quebec, 2023, p.5).

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