

Share coffee-bean example outside Google

17 posts by 6 authors



melandory@google.com

Jun 8



Hey all,

I want to translate parts of go/coffee-beans to my mother tongue and share outside of google. Do you know if it's allowed?

[Click here to Reply](#)



Alex Nicolaou

Jun 8



Other recipients: melandory@google.com

It technically is not allowed by default but I think there are some clear steps you can follow to get permission:

1. Get Verna's permission to translate the document and approve your translation. As the author of the work I see Verna has having complete ownership and editorial control over its distribution and content.
2. Figure out how you want to attribute it when you publish it, and get some internal approvals to publish your translated version. If you don't want to claim credit for it or associate it with Google this could be quite lightweight; but if you want to attribute it to Google and associate it with us that could be both harder and more impactful (people will pay more attention to it in that case).

What are you thinking in terms of how you'll publish it and how it'll be attributed?

alex

On Thursday, June 8, 2017, <melandory@google.com> wrote:

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**Tanja Gornak**

Jun 8

**Other recipients:** anicolao@google.com

On Jun 8, 2017 7:15 PM, "Alex Nicolaou" <anicolao@google.com> wrote:

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1. Get Verna's permission to translate the document and approve your translation. As the author of the work I see Verna has having complete ownership and editorial control over its distribution and content.

Cool, I'll send permission request, thanks!

1. Figure out how you want to attribute it when you publish it, and get some internal approvals to publish your translated version. If you don't want to claim credit for it or associate it with Google this could be quite lightweight; but if you want to attribute it to Google and associate it with us that could be both harder and more impactful (people will pay more attention to it in that case).

I want to share it in personal blog. I haven't had the intention to claim the credit or attribute it to Google (but I might give it a second thought, since I agree about impact) Initially I just thought that it's very nice analogy and might help my non-Google female friends to better defend their position.

What are you thinking in terms of how you'll publish it and how it'll be attributed?

alex

On Thursday, June 8, 2017, <melandory@google.com> wrote:

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**Verna**

Jun 8



Other recipients: melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

+Caitlyn, who had a similar question previously
+Damien, who was also in this conversation

See [Employee Communications Policy](#).

Someone from the press team responded with "You're welcome to post something in your personal capacity -- not on behalf of Google. I'd be prepared for some stiff blowback, though, along the lines of 'Do we really need to reduce people to coffee beans to understand the value of diversity?' I personally find it too reductive."

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Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 12:04 PM, Verna Friesen <vjfriesen@google.com> wrote:

> Someone from the press team responded with "You're welcome to post something in your personal capacity -- not on behalf of Google. I'd be prepared for some stiff blowback, though, along the lines of 'Do we really need to reduce people to coffee beans to understand the value of diversity?' I personally find it too reductive."

That sounds like good advice. To me, there are at least two aspects of the charge that it's "reductive". Coffee beans are unlike people in that it doesn't matter how we treat them—only how the liquid tastes after we roast, grind, and decoct them—and in the first place, resorting to analogies can seem patronizing to the audience, insulting to their intelligence.

Rather than translating the doc, I'd encourage you to express your own thoughts in your own words. Maybe you can do a better job, and avoid or address the problems explored in earlier threads in this group!



Paul Leventis

Jun 8



Other recipients: dahlstrom@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

Another opinion is that reducing the problem and expressing it in a less charged, non-human format enables focus on one specific aspect of a very complicated discussion. Coffee beans was the first time that I'd seen a succinct, clear description of why disproportionate effort may be needed to achieve a different mix.

My intelligence doesn't feel particularly insulted for having needed this simplification to view the problem more clearly. But I imagine there can exist people who feel that way.

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Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: pleventis@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

Thanks, Paul. I understand people have different impressions. My own initial response was confusion, because I find the presentation of the statistical argument overcomplicated with non-essential details (and, more recently, missing essential ones). It took me several readings to understand it initially, and discussions in this group so far suggest how difficult it can be.

I think the main point of go/coffee-beans is simply expressed: to increase hiring does not necessarily require hiring “worse” people; you can hire more “good” candidates by improving the evaluation process so they're less likely to be rejected.



Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: pleventis@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 1:07 PM, Dana Dahlstrom <dahlstrom@google.com> wrote:
> to increase hiring does not necessarily require hiring “worse” people

Oops! I meant: does not necessarily require hiring “bad” people—the non-Grade-A beans in the analogy. This argument relies on a binary classification of “good” and “bad”, and suggesting a scale of “better” and “worse” undermines the claim, as Purujit observed in another thread.



Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com, anicolao@google.com

To anyone who may make an argument along these lines, publicly or otherwise, I'd suggest even if you choose something like a coffee-bean analogy, not to promote different evaluation processes for different colors. I expect that is the biggest lightning rod here, because of the fairness and equal-opportunity questions it raises when applied to people. A more prudent suggestion, I think, would be "planting more fields of teal beans".



Alex Nicolaou

Jun 8



Other recipients: dahlstrom@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

You demonstrate once again that you completely don't get or don't agree with the point of the document.

It's not at all about planting more beans. It's about recognizing that diversity hiring efforts don't have to amount to lowering the bar: that is is possible to imagine coming up with processes where the bar is maintained but diversity is still improved.

alex

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Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 1:50 PM, Alex Nicolaou <anicolao@google.com> wrote:

> You demonstrate once again that you completely don't get or don't agree with the point of the document. [...] It's about recognizing that diversity hiring efforts don't have to amount to lowering the bar: that is is possible to imagine coming up with processes where the bar is maintained but diversity is still improved.

Please explain to me how this sentence fails to convey my understanding of that point:

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 1:07 PM, Dana Dahlstrom <dahlstrom@google.com> wrote:

> I think the main point of go/coffee-beans is simply expressed: to increase hiring does not necessarily require hiring "bad" people; you can hire more "good" candidates by improving the evaluation process so they're less likely to be rejected.



Purujit Saha

Jun 8



Other recipients: dahlstrom@google.com, anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

It's about recognizing that diversity hiring efforts don't have to amount to lowering the bar: that is possible to imagine coming up with processes where the bar is maintained but diversity is still improved.

Although it is commonly referred to as a bar (indicating a binary pass/fail decision), in practice it is more of a distribution of quality among hires that we need to maintain. And yes, it is possible to come up with processes that maintain the distribution but improve diversity. The crucial factor in such processes is that it should not have any influence on the hiring decision. For example, adapting the information we use to assess the candidate against the hiring bar only for candidates from minority backgrounds (as go/diversity-mythbusters suggest) before making the hiring decision would impact the quality distribution because it will lower the false negative rates (by virtue of having more or less information than the other groups) for that group of candidates. As another example, letting candidates with minority backgrounds have more opportunities to learn about working at google after they have an offer (to convince them to work at google over their other offers), will not impact the distribution because arguably, the outcome of this process does not depend on the quality of the candidate. In other words, the inputs to the interview process and the interview process itself need to be the same for all candidates regardless of their backgrounds.

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Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 1:55 PM, Dana Dahlstrom <dahlstrom@google.com> wrote:
> Please explain to me how this sentence fails to convey my understanding [...]

On reflection, no need to explain. As I wrote earlier, I did have trouble following the document initially, but that was a long time ago and I think I understand it pretty well now.

Leaving aside problems with the statistical argument, which could be corrected, I'm concerned with messages the document may send. In particular there are two possible implications I hope are false about Google:

1. The company's motivation for diversity is primarily the bottom line, and matters such as fairness to candidates and happiness and

belonging among employees of all backgrounds are subsidiary at best.

2. We might design different hiring or evaluation processes for different groups of candidates with the intent that people's demographic traits would affect their chances of being hired.

These implications are somewhat disguised by the coffee-bean abstraction, which is part of the reason I agree with the complaint that it's “reductive” and I'm suggesting folks think twice about spreading it externally.



Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 2:53 PM, Dana Dahlstrom <dahlstrom@google.com> wrote:
> These implications are somewhat disguised by the coffee-bean abstraction

Actually it's not just that it disguises them, but that it countenances them.



Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 8



Other recipients: anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

On Thu, Jun 8, 2017 at 1:50 PM, Alex Nicolaou <anicolao@google.com> wrote:
> It's not at all about planting more beans.

Right, go/coffee-beans does not mention the possibility of planting more teal beans; I suggested that might be more prudent. Many of our efforts described at go/diversity are analogous.

I gather Google does not use a “quick, cheap evaluation process” to reject more candidates of some demographics and an “expensive process” to reject fewer of others. To the contrary I understand we aim to avoid differential treatment, not codify it.

Especially since go/coffee-beans seems to misrepresent Google's hiring practices in a way that could raise legal questions, I think we're better off not sharing it externally.



Purujit Saha

Jun 9



Other recipients: dahlstrom@google.com, anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

I gather Google does not use a “quick, cheap evaluation process” to reject more candidates of some demographics and an “expensive process” to reject fewer of others.

My impression is that google does tailor the evaluation process based on the background of the candidate. Here is what go/diversity-mythbusters (I assume that doc is official) have to say about this

The hiring bar (which is about how well we think the candidate will do at Google) for a given job ladder and level is the same for everyone. However, the information we use to assess the candidate against the hiring bar is adaptable depending on the candidate's background.

And here's what Alan Eustace and Niika Thomas said at a (TGIF)[<https://sites.google.com/a/google.com/tgif-info/highlights/diversitytgif?pli=1>):

Alan Eustace: One of the things that we found when I — I actually for a long time, I looked at every single packet for women and diversity out of engineering. Anybody we rejected with a score of over 2.5, I read the packet, for a really, really long time. What I found in a lot of these cases was, these are really rare people. We don't get to see very many. You know, a black female engineer in our pool, you know, we're going to see, like, a vanishingly small number of them. So why don't we spend a little extra time with that candidate? You know, why don't we maybe have them interview with — you know, if they had a math major and a computer science, why don't we have somebody interview — both of them from both those disciplines. Or why don't we do more reference checks. Or why don't we do a bunch of things just to make sure that we're not having a false negative in this case. So let's work harder on the false negatives. If I can just get rid of every false negative, we're going to have a great company that's going to have a lot of really smart people. And I'll give you one example of this. When I went through this packet, I saw this packet, it was kind of a coin flip. It was a woman, and she was — she looked pretty good on things. She had one bad interview. So I called her advisor, who happened to be a friend of mine. And I said, hey, did we make a mistake here? He said, yeah, you made one of the worst mistakes you probably ever made. That was the best candidate I have ever had in a Ph.D. program. She went to a major university. She's a faculty member. She's doing fantastic. But we missed her not because, you know, our interview process was hopelessly flawed. It was because we didn't take the time to make one phone call. So for these rare candidates, really think about what could you do in those cases to make sure that you're not making a mistake, because there are very few of these people out there.

Nilka Thomas: Just to add to that, we know that we're actually making good decisions. When Alan talks about this extra process, we actually have tracked the data, and we've looked at how people have performed ones they've actually gotten here, and the results are sound. It's often that we have a false negative. And as Alan mentioned, we can't afford it with these candidates, they're in such small supply.

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Dana Dahlstrom

Jun 9



Other recipients: purujiit@google.com, anicolao@google.com, vjfriesen@google.com, melandory@google.com, desfontaines@google.com, caitlyn@google.com

Clearly we won't repeat any of that externally since TGIF is a confidential forum.

I may have heard Alan Eustace's remarks at the time, and they probably sounded good to me. It's natural to make extra effort to avoid missing rare opportunities, and I think most of us share the goal of a diverse, egalitarian workforce.

Surely the hiring process is somewhat idiosyncratic, and certain candidates will get extra attention for various reasons, fair or not. However I think we should be very careful about implying, especially in public, that Google might systematically treat candidates differently based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
