Proposal to help hire for diversity

Recruiting companies can be a force for change and they have the power to diversify their client's organization.

This white paper contains suggested work practices for recruiting companies and for hiring organisations. It has 2 parts, the first is for recruiting companies and the second is for hiring companies.

It is put together by the Equaliser Foundation and includes best practices from some of the companies we work with, our own experiences in management and big company practices, and research from all over the world, including our own.

We regard the recruiting company (in this paper) as an advisor of their client, not as an organisation.

For Recruiting Companies

DATA IS KING - MONITORING IS CRUCIAL

If you are not already doing so, start collecting data regarding the diversity of your candidates based on more easily available diversity data like: sex, age, race. At every search process, take count of the mix of candidates against these attributes. Note what the percentage of each gender is, what is the age diversity and the racial diversity of your recommended candidate list both at the long list and then at the short list stages.

Try to collect this data grouped also by industry sector, role and level. Of course GDPR rules need to be complied with and privacy and/or anonymity needs to be ensured.

TAKE STOCK OF YOUR RESULTS

If your company is collecting data regarding sex, age and race it is important that you regularly review this data and face the reality it shows. At the end of the business year, you can look at your diversity results, just as you do with your other business metrics. Once you have the data, talk about it in your company and look for reasons, evaluate the facts. This will help you change things in case you want to. Not knowing and not facing issues makes change impossible.

INCLUSION

(a) Language

The area of language as a tool for inclusion is a well-researched area. The language, the tone, and the details that are used for describing a role or positions will influence which groups' members will be more or less likely to apply for it. There has been significant research around specific language that tends to be more appealing subconsciously to men vs. women in job descriptions.[1] Certain words or phrases when used repeatedly tend to discourage female job seekers, especially in more male-dominated fields.

As a responsible recruiting firm it is your role to make sure not to discriminate against any groups when you are working. Lack of awareness however often makes us repeat what we have always done. Learn about the techniques that are needed to write inclusive job descriptions and you will attract a more suitable and diverse candidate pool.

(b) Circumstances

Realise that most women today have more child care duties than men do. Work and work hours are traditionally organised around men's needs and schedules. Be sensitive that women might have to operate with different schedules for interviews and assessments and cater for them, do not lose them from the process just because of their circumstances.

DURING RECRUITMENT

When putting together a shortlist of candidates for hiring companies, make sure multiple women are included. If there is more than one woman in your shortlist, the chances of a woman being hired increase[2].

Use skill-based assessment tasks in recruitment. Instead of solely relying on interviews, ask candidates to perform tasks they would also be expected to perform in the future job. From these job simulations, one can predict how well an individual may perform on a job. Use standardized tasks and evaluation criteria to ensure fairness between candidates[3].

Use structured interviews in recruitment. While both structured and unstructured interviews have advantages and disadvantages, unstructured interviews allow more room for unconscious bias and stereotypes to influence the recruitment process. Ask the same questions from the candidates and use standardized evaluation criteria to reduce the effect of unconscious bias.[4]

[1]Iris Bohnet (2016). What works: Gender Equality by Design, Harvard University Press, https://scholar.harvard.edu/iris_bohnet/what-works

[2]Johnson, S. K., Hekman, D. R., & Chan, E. T. (2016). If there's only one woman in your candidate pool, there's statistically no chance she'll be hired. *Harvard Business Review*, 26(04). https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired

[3]McDaniel, M. A., & Nguyen, N. T. (2001). Situational judgment tests: A review of practice and constructs assessed. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment,* 9(1-2), 103–113. http://www.people.vcu.edu/~mamcdani/Publications/McDaniel%20%26%20Nguyen%202001%20IJSA.pdf

[4]Bragger, J.D., Kutcher, E., Morgan, J. *et al.* (2002). The Effects of the Structured Interview on Reducing Biases Against Pregnant Job Applicants. *Sex Roles* 46, 215–226. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1019967231059

Interviewers should give their feedback independently, not hearing each others' opinions. Only once they have submitted their own evaluation should they discuss it together, otherwise they will be affected by each other's statements.

AWARENESS, TRANSPARENCY and ATTENTION

Many organizations today are still not aware of the importance of actively dealing with diversity. This lack of awareness is a crucial obstacle. We cannot fix what we do not recognise as broken. Homogeneous organisations are the norm and the tradition, but with available science and research, with observing what the world's most successful companies do, it is clear that diversity needs to be the new norm.

Learning and understanding is therefore crucial, but so is the declaration that the issue exists: there is significantly less representation of women, ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQ+, and disabled people in management of big companies than white men. (Even compared to their proportion in the population.)

Talk to your clients at the briefing stage about the need to compile a diverse candidate list in order for the client to get a proper view on who is available on the market.

Make it clear what your views and experience on diversity is, and ask the client to do the same.

BE SENSITIVE

Discrimination can be very subtle, the main reason for discrimination is our unconscious bias that is deep in all human beings. It is therefore very difficult to spot. Say it out loud: did we eliminate that woman or that Roma person because they are not like the usual candidate or the usual leader of the hiring company? How can you and your client be sure that you are treating and evaluating all candidates according to the same criteria, on a level playing field?

Catch yourself and others if you find that you are using shortcuts to make quick decisions about whether a "type" of person would or would not fit a role. Be careful to avoid letting one or two historical examples of candidates from a specific background form the basis for evaluating all others.[5]

EDUCATION

For the staff of the recruiting firm

For the clients of the recruiting firm

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[5]https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/attachments/2020/06/rr_gender_neutral_job_descriptions.pdf

Educate the staff of your firm on unconscious bias[6] and on the business and social advantages of diversity. Do not dismiss the importance of it without studying it.

Educate your clients. Your clients often need urgent help from their executive search firms. It is crucial to have a proper brief from the client, to understand who the organisation needs to hire to advance it in the best way. Help your clients analyze their own needs carefully and thoughtfully.

Trying to hire on the basis of fitting into the corporate culture is a double edged sword: it might bring in somebody who fits in quickly and is liked by all current colleagues, but it will not ensure new ideas, new dynamics and will not help innovation. Sometimes homogeneous groups are more successful, but in leadership, this would be rare. Learn when diversity wins over a monoculture.

COMMUNICATE ON THE ISSUES OF DIVERSITY REGULARLY

Along the search process it is important to keep an eye on the numbers. Just to state the facts regarding the composition of the long and the short candidate list. Are women and other minority groups represented in the process? This keeps you and your client aware of your decisions, and helps to evaluate the candidates on a level playing field.

For Hiring Organisations

DATA IS KING - MONITORING IS CRUCIAL

Use a detailed data dashboard for tracking all sorts of numbers regarding the composition of your workforce. For example make sure you know the gender mix at all levels of your management (and at all locations, sites). This way you can follow the trends and if you need to, you can set targets.

Although it is not the topic of this white paper, we think this is so important and in some countries now legally crucial, we are proposing it, to track the gender pay gap. Your compensation and benefit planning should be preceded by deep dive analysis and tracking of the facts and pay gap-informed data. Transparent wage data show that companies cultivate openness and this makes them even more attractive to potential employees.

TAKE STOCK OF YOUR RESULTS

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[6]Online unconscious bias training material by Telekom: https://www.telekom.hu/rolunk/fenntarthatosag/sokszinuseg-eselyegyenloseg/sokszinu-es-nyitott-vallalati-kulturaert and a personal unconscious bias training for companies by the Equaliser Foundation: https://egyenlitoalapitvany.org/trainings/

If your company is collecting data regarding sex, age and race it is important that you regularly review this data and face the reality it shows. At the end of the business year, you can look at your diversity results, just as you would do with your business numbers.

HR PROCESSES

Recruitment

Research shows that the CVs of female candidates get selected for interviews a lot less frequently than men.[7] Male applicants tend to be seen as significantly more competent and hireable than the (identical) female applicant. Applicants' CVs should be screened without a name or photo.

Regular Employee Evaluations

Evaluations are often subjective. This can leave a lot of room for bias. Make sure all employees in similar roles have the same evaluation criteria, the more data based, the more result oriented, and objective, the better. Always re-evaluate your own and your team's decisions on employee evaluations, asking: "did we have bias here?"

Promotions

Just like with employee evaluations, deciding on promotions can be very subjective. Making the criteria transparent to all employees can help a lot to combat bias and to communicate to all employees that the decisions are fair and well thought through.

Have targets for your employee mix

In business, setting goals is the first step towards achieving them. Treat diversity as a business goal. Set a target for female representation in total management. This is how the organisation will take it seriously. You should aim at gender parity in leadership.

Ask recruiting companies to help you achieve your goals. Set them female quota on executive search shortlists. Be aware that that research[8] found that shortlists with only one woman do not increase the chance of a woman being selected. Thus ask recruiting companies to include more than one woman in shortlists for recruitment.

[7]Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, John F. Dovidio, Victoria L. Brescoll, Mark J. Graham, and Jo Handelsman (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Psychological and Cognitive Sciences.* 109(41): 16474–16479. https://ctl.yale.edu/sites/default/files/basic-page-supplementary-materials-files/science_facultys_subtle_gender_biases_favor_male_students.pdf

[8]Johnson, S. K., Hekman, D. R., & Chan, E. T. (2016). If there's only one woman in your candidate pool, there's statistically no chance she'll be hired. Harvard Business Review, 26(04). https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired

Inclusive Wording of Role Descriptions

First, check job descriptions for gender-biased terminology that may discourage women from applying. Examine the specific words that are used and purge the gendered language. Research shows that many words are associated with masculine or feminine stereotypes and these words unconsciously influence the job people apply for.[9] Some job descriptions, especially in male-dominated industries and occupations, sometimes suggest that masculine behavior (strong, driven, competitive, dominate, etc.) is required, potentially signaling that women need not apply. Use technology to audit your job descriptions for potentially biased language. There are a wide range of tools and resources available to reduce hiring bias and create neutral job descriptions.[10]

Second, assess and review your job descriptions. Are your job descriptions excluding some groups that could be perfectly qualified? Take a look at the 'must haves' (requirements) vs. the 'nice to haves' (preferences), and limit the number of mandatory qualifications to apply for the job. List only the skills that are completely necessary for the role. Research shows that many women only apply for a job when they meet almost all of the listed requirements, while men tend to have a lower threshold for applying.[11]

Third, if your company values promote diversity, express your commitment to equality and diversity in your job description so applicants know they would work for an inclusive organization. State your family-friendly benefits (such as parental leave, flextime, child care subsidies etc.) to let the applicants know what you offer and to broaden the range of candidates.

BE SENSITIVE

Discrimination can be very subtle. The main reason for discrimination is our unconscious bias that is deep in all human beings. It is therefore very difficult to spot. In dealing with issues and meetings that will affect hiring processes, employees' results, their promotion, pay and advancement, always question the outcome and the process. Always double-check whether the decision is objective, fair and the criteria is clear.

Make sure that you are treating and evaluating all employees according to the same criteria, on a level playing field. Ask colleagues from underrepresented groups to help you identify potential weaknesses in current recruiting and hiring strategies.

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[9]Gaucher, D., Friesen, J., & Kay, A. C. (2011). Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,http://www.fortefoundation.org/site/DocServer/gendered_wording_JPSP.pdf?docID=16121

[10]https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/attachments/2020/06/rr_gender_neutral_job_descriptions.pdf

[11]https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2016/12/14/how-to-take-gender-bias-out-of-your-job-ads/?sh=69538c151024

EDUCATION

Make unconscious bias training mandatory for all employees. This is easiest done as part of your onboarding process as onboarding trainings. Of course, you need to train already present employees. The most critical people in your organisation for diversity are the HR and recruiting personnel and this group requires specialist training, in order to be ready to hire diverse staff for the organisation and help all managers to utilise inclusive hiring and work practices. If you fail to get diverse people in the door, your diversity goals will be impossible to achieve.

But there is another group, the most visible and the most listened to group that needs to be trained. These are the leaders of the organisation. We highly recommend inclusive leadership training for people managers and top managers, that not only covers unconscious bias and how to combat them, but inclusive communication, too. Learning how to communicate in a way that everybody feels included at the organisation is very important.

DIVERSITY MANAGERS/TASK FORCES

Appoint diversity managers or task forces to help promote social accountability. A diversity manager or a task force can monitor the recruitment and talent acquisition processes. People involved in the recruitment process can reduce their biases because they know their behavior is monitored and can be held accountable. The diversity managers should have a senior/executive role within the organization, have access to internal data, be able to ask for more information regarding certain recruitment/promotion decisions, and have the power and resources to create and implement diversity strategies and policies.[12] Of course, the role of a diversity manager is more broad and covers more areas than hiring and promotion, but in this paper, we only touch the role regarding these activities.

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[12] Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2016). Why diversity programs fail. Harvard Business Review, 94(7/8), 52-60. https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail