



Diversity and Inclusion Best Practice in Recruitment

What you need to know

Whilst diversity and inclusion (D&I) has developed into a discrete HR discipline, they should not be managed as a stand-alone agenda. To make sustainable progress towards becoming a diverse and inclusive organisation, D&I needs to be integrated into every core people process. One of the core processes is talent acquisition.

If candidate pools and resulting hires are not sufficiently diverse, then the talent management activities which follow will not grow sufficiently diverse leaders for the future.

Plus, if an organisation's culture is not inclusive to everyone, this will limit its ability to retain diverse talent.

In this Diversity and Inclusion Best Practice in Recruitment Guide, our D&I team have summarised key areas of awareness about hiring, and some tips for creating fair and inclusive processes.

Considerations when making decisions about people

- We tend to hire and promote 'in our own image' – selecting, developing and sponsoring people who are like us, have similar backgrounds, or who have attributes similar to our own which we tend to value over others. This is a type of unconscious bias known as affinity bias.
- 'Merit' is not an objective or gender-neutral concept: it is influenced by affinity bias i.e. our idea of a successful person may reflect our own strengths; conversely, we may find it harder to see merit in people who are different to ourselves.
- Sometimes, the criteria for more senior roles are subtly skewed in favour of the dominant 'in-group' (which is typically white, heterosexual, middle-aged and male); biased criteria (such as performance standard and behavioural indicators) can become embedded in frameworks such as leadership capability models.
- The type and background of the person previously in a role, as well as the composition of the broader team, often influences who is regarded as most suitable to fill a vacancy.
- Someone who behaves in a way that is inconsistent with commonly-held stereotypes and the associated exceptions may be viewed negatively in hiring and other processes.
- People wishing to work flexibly may often be viewed less favourably in a range of situations – including recruitment – due to a common negative bias against flexible workers, particularly part-time employees, the majority of whom are usually women.
- The more discretion that decision-makers such as hiring managers have, the greater the potential for individual bias to influence their decisions.
- The new hire's on-boarding experience can significantly impact their longer-term retention; a new hire's early perception of being included or excluded – wholly or partially – makes a difference.

The Challenges of Recruiting Diverse Talent

Below, we have set out the major barriers to diverse recruitment – reflecting our own in-depth experience with clients, which is reinforced by a body of academic and workplace research. Of the practices below, which of them apply to your organisation?



1. Defining the Vacancy

- **Narrow role definition:** a disproportionate focus on professional or technical qualifications rather than broader capabilities.
- **Experience focus:** excessive pre-occupation with experience rather than demonstrated competency in other roles, agility and potential.
- **Inconsistent criteria:** little or no linkage between role and person requirements, and organisational competency or capability frameworks.
- **Exclusive criteria:** setting a person specification with essential or desired attributes such as 'drive', 'competitiveness' or 'assertiveness' which may reflect gender or other bias.
- **Lack of flexibility:** a failure to proactively indicate that the vacant role is capable of being fulfilled with some degree of flexibility.



2. Marketing the Vacancy

- **Exclusive language:** words and phrases that reinforce stereotypical (e.g. male) attributes such as 'determined', 'winner', 'relentless focus', 'necessary gravitas', 'can own the room', 'able to work with equally ambitious people'.
- **Generic content:** failure to identify and respond to the motivations of diverse talent, for example using a values-based approach or emphasising the social or community contribution of the role.
- **Exclusive presentation:** use of visual formats and imagery, for example sports, in role advertisements which are likely to appeal to certain types of candidates more than others.
- **Untargeted media:** over-reliance on a standard, default selection of broad-reach paper and on-line media without complementing this through lower-reach but highly targeted channels.



3. Sifting and Short-listing

- **Filtering out good talent:** reviewing CVs is labour and time-intensive; time-pressure increases the risk that shortlisted candidates reflect stereotypes, assumptions and default biases. Compelling research indicates that CV information revealing or implying gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and educational background all impact short-listing decisions.
- **Over-reliance on employee referrals:** these are a cost-effective aid to recruitment, but which also add a risk of unconscious (affinity) bias and a perpetuation of a particular candidate type or background.



4. Interviewing

- **Weak hiring manager capability:** many managers are untrained in competency-based question techniques and/or are unaware of the impact of unconscious biases on their interviewing approach. They rely on 'intuition' or 'gut-feel'. This results in capable and talented candidates being filtered out of the process because of their background or individual differences – an unnecessary and costly loss to the organisation.
- **Low HR / recruitment manager input:** HR partners need to be equipped to proactively advise, coach and, where necessary, challenge the thinking of hiring managers – before, during and after an interview.



5. Hiring Decision-Making

- **Hiring decisions are made by one individual:** if this happens, expect unconscious bias to subtly filter out certain types of candidates, who may be capable of performing the role.
- **Hiring decisions are made against poorly-defined, inconsistent or subjective criteria:** this increases the chance of inconsistent, subjective and inequitable (i.e. biased) decisions.
- **The basis for a hiring decision is not documented or transparent:** if hiring decisions and their rationale are not recorded, they cannot be easily reviewed, challenged or defended.



6. On-Boarding

- **A focus on administration but not inclusion:** administrative and compliance actions required for new hires should not occur at the expense of activities which help an individual feel integrated and included from the outset. Frequently, new employees are quickly left to navigate their own way in the organisation, identify stakeholders and establish relationships. Some people will find this easier, and be more successful, than others.
- **Team culture:** if a team's culture is not inclusive to all its members, a dominant in-group is likely to form; if the background of a new team member means s/he is excluded, their engagement, performance and retention are likely to be impacted.



7. Monitoring and Review

- **Weak measurement of diversity in recruitment:** without accurate and relevant metrics which indicate where the leakage of diverse talent is occurring in your recruitment process, it is very difficult to pinpoint the issues and implement changes.
- **Limited reporting of diversity in recruitment:** if key stakeholders are unaware of how successful your organisation is at recruiting diverse talent, it may be difficult to build support for changes in recruitment practices and investment in best practice.



8. Vendor Management

- **Recruitment / search firms' words vs. action:** diversity policies or statements of intent are easy to publish but harder to realise; can your recruitment partners demonstrate:
 - diversity amongst their consultants?
 - awareness of current diversity and inclusion best practice?
 - a credible track record of building diverse candidate pools?
 - a partnership mindset in addressing your diversity needs?
- **Lack of diversity service level agreements:** a contract for the delivery of diverse recruitment outcomes with commercial implications if these are not achieved is a powerful lever in ensuring your diverse recruitment needs are met in a competitive marketplace.

Next steps

We are always ready to have an informal and confidential conversation about how we can help you strengthen your recruitment or other people processes, as well as build a more inclusive workplace for diverse talent.

Capita Talent Consulting has developed a range practical actions that can be taken in response to the challenges, and which can have a measurable impact on diversity and inclusion in your organisation.

It's not just about gender

Whilst increased gender diversity is often a key priority for organisations, the best practice principles we set out apply to all types of diversity – it's about recruiting 'with a wide-angle lens'. This can only be done effectively if individual hiring managers are aware of their hidden personal biases, and their decisions are made in an environment where the impact of unconscious bias is understood, recognised and challenged in a constructive and timely way.

Stakeholder capabilities may need enhancing

To underpin process improvement, there is often a need to build the capabilities of stakeholders, i.e. the managers and leaders who interpret policies and apply or support processes – particularly the decision-makers within them and process 'owners'. This involves enhancing stakeholders' knowledge and skill in relation to D&I, and influencing their attitudes.

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