

Making workplaces more inclusive: five tips on how to get better at hiring

Diversity and inclusion are often mentioned at the same time and can be thought of as interconnected, but they are different and both equally vital to a thriving workplace culture. Hiring a diverse workforce doesn't guarantee that every employee has the same experience or opportunities in the workplace.

Think of inclusivity as the underpinning step to successfully supporting a diverse workforce: it's all about creating an inclusive environment that welcomes and includes each employee, anchoring your decision making to their experience and not their demographic.

As most hiring managers are aware, diversity is not just a buzzword or a box to be ticked. It should be a fundamental aspiration for all organisations. Having a diverse workforce has been proven time and time again to give an organisation the edge. Winning clients, attracting talent, or even securing funding to take a company public can depend on diversity. The returns on diversity are tangible, especially when it comes to innovation: a large survey over multiple countries found that organisations with above-average diversity had, on average, 19% higher innovation revenues and 9% higher earnings before interest and tax margins.

The working world is going through a rapid transformation. The number of

companies able to visibly compete for talent is increasing daily and the 'great resignation' is proving that a big brand and salary is no longer enough to attract and retain people, especially those in high demand.

Talent is moving from organisations in record numbers in the search of greater work-life balance, purpose and fulfilment in their work.

One of the most crucial ways organisations will need to evolve over the coming years to be able to sustain their talent pipelines is to prioritise the development of inclusive cultures that celebrate and empower people from all communities and backgrounds. It is vital to take a proactive approach to attracting talent from the broadest pools possible.

The key to talent acquisition

Talent acquisition is the single most effective way an organisation can increase diversity within its workforce. This is why so much importance has been placed on the hiring process recently. Human resource specialists need to identify and employ strategies that can increase their likelihood of finding more diverse candidates to sustain their talent pipelines. With this priority in mind, it's important to look at how we can maximise attempts to remove bias from the hiring process and make attraction from the broadest possible pools a reality.

A recruiter's goal is to fill a seat with the best available person. However, this is problematic because there is so much room for interpretation around what 'the best candidate' embodies, and that subjectivity is where bias creeps in.

Research regularly shows that regardless of how hard we try to eliminate our conscious or unconscious bias, it will always be there and it's very difficult to mitigate it. And this is no different for HR and recruitment professionals when searching and interviewing candidates.

The danger for recruiters is that with inherent biases in the initial stages of recruitment, you will overlook great talent. Current figures suggest that 43% of CVs are discarded because they are written in the third person and 76% are ignored if you have an unprofessional email address. This results in poor hiring outcomes such as low employee or manager satisfaction, like-for-like hiring,

higher turnover as well as the risk of a homogeneous workforce with a low diversity in talent.

Decision-making

Ultimately, we are all human and implicit bias will naturally occur at some stage of the hiring process. However, it's especially important to try and remove as much subjective decision-making at the early stages such as candidate screening and start being more specific over what we're looking for – but in terms of skills, not experiences. This allows for employers to assess from a wider talent pool before deciding who will go through to interview. It gives the highest possible chance of a candidate with the best skillsets to be selected as well as enhancing the non-tokenised diversity of a workforce.

As the CEO and cofounder of Clu, we are on a mission to revolutionise recruitment tech and build a democratic job market. We want to be the leader in advocacy for job seekers and ensure no one feels “other” in a hiring process ever again. We give job seekers from all backgrounds a fair opportunity to demonstrate their value to organisations and get hired into roles they would thrive in.

Clu focuses on what job seekers do best. Instead of lengthy CVs and cover letters, it favours snappy information like skills, behaviours, aspirations, and career expectations. We get to know job seekers better and present them with more meaningful and appropriate career opportunities – rewarding a much greater return on effort and up to 60% more responses from organisations.

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As with all inclusion programmes, there are quick wins and longer-term strategies that you can adopt. Many of the systemic interventions needed may take some time to imbed in your processes and working with experts to develop these policies and frameworks is essential, regularly reflecting on your inclusion practices and taking timely action to make improvements to build a more inclusive hiring process and inclusive workplace, together. But there are also several quick adjustments you can make to quickly add value to overlooked communities, resulting in greater applications and trust.

Five ways to get better at inclusive

hiring

Write more inclusive job descriptions and be inclusive in all marketing and comms. Be mindful of how you write your job description by favouring neutral language. Technical, coded and gendered language can deter some candidates and attract a more homogenous group. This decreases the chances of a varied range of applicants.

Confirm the skills you are looking for in a candidate and articulate this publicly. This will help you avoid unhelpful criteria like 'years of experience' and reduce selection bias in your process. Sign up for the disability confident scheme and other accountability-focused inclusive recruitment initiatives to further demonstrate your commitment to reducing barriers to entry.

Every touchpoint is an opportunity for inclusion if you understand a candidate's needs. At the beginning of your application process, ask candidates for their pronouns, accessibility requirements or even offer options to phonetically record name pronunciation.

Standardise assessments. To maximise objectivity, ensure you create a level playing field for any assessments and scrutinise language and criteria within. Also ensure that every candidate is assessed consistently by the same people against the same score card, with feedback being collected instantly post interview, to ensure transparency, consistency and fairness. Ensure key internal hiring managers are trained in inclusion and inclusive terminology and their training is updated annually

Focus on skills instead of subject matter. Most jobs require some subject knowledge, but subject knowledge is not the determining factor in whether someone can or can't perform a role. Soft and transferable skills are continually proven to be far more valuable to organisations as they make learnable subject matter relevant within an organisation's context. Focusing your interviews on soft skills as well as technical skills will help remove barriers to entry.

Move away from auto-CV sifting technology. CV sifters are riddled with as much bias as people because they favour CVs with specific job titles, key words, years of experience and sector backgrounds. Yes, these metrics are important, but they also create major barriers for great candidates who have just come from a non-traditional background.

Broaden your talent pools. When you are promoting job opportunities, make sure you advertise far and wide and proactively engage with marginalised communities to let them know your workplace is one that welcomes them.' When posting roles, don't wait for diverse talent to find you. Think where different pools of candidates are networking and are represented and

proactively outreach there too.

In conclusion

To end with, I want to highlight the important concept of cognitive diversity. Some teams possess a mix of working styles that offer unique, and complementary strengths, most favour “culture fit” which results in significant limitations around cognitive diversity.

Cognitive diversity is the source of different ways of thinking, processing, and acting. Leaders should be tapping into it as an invaluable tool to build successful, innovative and high-performing organisations.

If you look for it, cognitive diversity is all around – but people like to fit in, so they are cautious about sticking their necks out. When we have a strong, homogenous culture – such as an engineering culture, an operational culture, or a relational culture – and we stifle the natural cognitive diversity in groups through the pressure to conform. We may not even be aware that it is happening.

To overcome these challenges, make sure your recruitment processes identify all forms of difference and recruit for cognitive diversity too. And when you face a new, uncertain, complex situation, and everyone agrees on what to do, find someone who disagrees and cherish them.

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