Online Forum Summary

Diverse and Inclusive Recruitment

AdCentrum
DE&I WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS

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Armstrong Wolfe Ad Centrum Symposium

Summary of tabletop exercise held on 29th February 2024

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Any look at the topic of Inclusive recruitment reveals a complex landscape with both pitfalls and potentials for organisations striving towards diversity and inclusiveness.

Data consistently indicates that many organisations currently approach inclusive hiring as a checkbox exercise, failing to address the deeper requirements for a genuinely diverse and supportive workplace.

This superficial approach often leads to a paradox where marginalised employees are recruited but depart swiftly due to the absence of necessary tools and an environment conducive to their success.

This cycle undermines the essence of inclusivity, as the external portrayal of diversity does not match the internal reality, highlighting the critical difference between simply having diverse representation and fostering an inclusive culture.

Despite these challenges, organisations can embark on meaningful journeys towards inclusivity. Biased recruiting strategies, often deeply ingrained in recruitment and onboarding processes, reflect a limited perspective that can adversely affect hiring. Such biases are perpetuated further when organisations adopt HR or recruiting software powered by AI, and organisations that utilise this software, which can, if used correctly, be a major practical benefit to the hiring process, must ensure the data they input is carefully assessed to remove as much potential bias as possible.

Furthermore, inclusive hiring requires critical reassessment of the criteria used in hiring practices. Moving away from conventional job titles and overly specific experience requirements, organisations are encouraged to focus on the core skills necessary for roles, to prevent certain groups, especially women and neurodiverse applicants who are statistically more likely to apply only to roles they feel are an exact match for their competencies and experiences, being excluded at the application stage of the hiring process.

In a similar vein, the recent popularity of scenario-based interview questions should be revisited, as they rely heavily on a candidate's ability to 'tell a story', and thus candidates with that skillset will outperform those who are less comfortable with narration even if the latter are in reality more suited to the role.

These problems are not new, even though they may be exacerbated by developments in technology, and by learning from their mistakes and the mistakes of other firms, organisations can ensure they avoid these common pitfalls.

Organisations often avoid direct engagement with these issues, preferring to circumvent rather than confront them, as acknowledgement of a potential problem with the inclusivity of your hiring process can be embarrassing and uncomfortable for managers and HR departments. This evasion is particularly problematic when leaders perpetuate a cycle of like-for-like hiring, failing to address their biases and the structural challenges within their recruitment strategies.

Practical solutions are within reach, however, with initiatives like the Women in Finance (WIF) charter marking a significant shift in recruitment over the past six years. These efforts must go beyond ticking boxes; they require a foundational commitment to building an inclusive recruitment framework that influences the broader organisational culture to drive change.

From a practical standpoint, for inclusive hiring to be effective, measures such as diverse shortlists and bias testing become essential, yet frequently insufficient resources are committed to the hiring process, and hence failing to give the necessary time for thorough specification development, extensive interviewing and other measures that can correct biases and ensure a diverse candidate pool.

Firms can have extensive controls and processes in place to encourage diverse hiring, but, on a very basic level, if recruitment teams have insufficient time/resources to implement them, as is often the case in a scramble to replace key personnel quickly, then they are null.

» Mandatory training for personnel responsible for inclusive hiring can significantly influence hiring managers' approaches, ensuring a focus on diversity and inclusion (D&I) does not wane under time pressures.

» Tactical implementation of diverse shortlists, particularly in senior roles where diversity is scant, alongside pushing back against head-hunters who claim a lack of diverse talent, can significantly impact the diversity of a candidate pool.

» Acknowledging and continually challenging biases before, during, and after interviews is critical.

» Other tools include pooled recruitment, the use of anonymous CVs to avert name bias, providing questions to candidates in advance, diverse interview panels, careful consideration of the language/wording used in advertisements, use of specialist recruitment agencies with a focus on diverse recruitment, using a scoring rubric and looking at different entry points into the profession.

Understanding where the gaps in attracting diverse talent lie, whether at the application stage or during interviews, is a crucial aspect of refining recruitment strategies for greater inclusivity.

This process requires a robust system of data management and analysis, enabling organisations to pinpoint specific stages where potential candidates from diverse backgrounds drop off or are disproportionately excluded.

By systematically collecting and examining data on the demographics of applicants, interviewees, and hires, companies can identify patterns that suggest biases or barriers within their recruitment process. This could include a higher rejection rate for candidates from certain groups at the initial resume screening, or a consistent lack of diversity among those advancing to final interview rounds.

Armed with this insight, organisations can then tailor their recruitment practices, from how job descriptions are worded to the diversity of the panels conducting interviews, ensuring that each step of the process supports rather than hinders the attraction and retention of diverse talent.

Moreover, such data-driven approaches allow for the continuous monitoring and adjustment of strategies, fostering a dynamic and responsive recruitment environment that genuinely upholds the principles of diversity and inclusion.

However, ensuring inclusive recruitment practices for internal progression is also paramount to preventing a lack of diversity at senior levels within an organisation. This approach underscores the necessity of transparent, equitable pathways for growth and advancement for all employees, thereby addressing and dismantling any unconscious biases that might hinder the ascension of underrepresented groups.

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By embedding inclusivity in the fabric of internal recruitment and promotion strategies, organisations not only leverage the diverse perspectives and talents already present within their teams but also signal a genuine commitment to diversity and equality. This fosters a culture where all employees feel valued and recognised, encouraging a more diverse workforce to aspire to and attain leadership positions.

Consequently, this intentional focus on inclusivity in internal progression ensures that the organisation's leadership reflects the diversity of its workforce, which is instrumental in driving innovation, understanding a wide range of customer needs, and enhancing decision-making processes.

It also serves as a powerful mechanism for retaining top talent, as employees are more likely to remain with an organisation that actively supports their professional growth and recognises their potential, irrespective of their background.

The financial services sector, plagued by a negative image, must broaden its talent outreach to younger individuals and not rely solely on traditional recruitment paths to enhance diversity.

Engaging with a broad spectrum of individuals not only helps in diversifying the talent pool but also brings fresh perspectives and innovative ideas into the industry.

A focus on inclusive recruitment is worth the investment of a COOs time and skills, for the benefits of such diverse recruitment are manifold. It enhances creativity and innovation by bringing together varied perspectives, experiences, and skills, which is crucial for problem-solving and generating new ideas.

Furthermore, a diverse workforce is more reflective of the sector's diverse client base, enabling better understanding and service of clients' needs.

By actively broadening its talent outreach to include younger, more diverse candidates, the financial services sector can not only improve its public image but also secure a competitive advantage through increased innovation, customer satisfaction, and adaptability to global market changes.

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