

NextGen



Recruiting for a **cognitively diverse** workforce

RESEARCH & INSIGHTS | MAY 2021





WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT...

The recruitment process can, if planned carefully and thoughtfully, help create a more cognitively diverse workforce.

This report is not a panacea because it's simply not possible – there is no one size fits all recruitment process. Our suggestions are based on examples where our research has shown they've worked for some.

There are some universal considerations when planning recruitment:

- You cannot eliminate unconscious bias so it must be actively managed throughout the process
- Everyone involved in the recruitment process needs to be committed to managing bias
- Language matters

Any changes you implement should be monitored and measured against your current baseline to see the impact they have. In addition, don't be afraid to ask applicants for feedback on the process as feedback helps support better processes and ultimately better outcomes.

We hope that this is the beginning of a conversation across the pensions industry about how we can recruit better. We would love to hear from you with any thoughts or other things you have tried in your recruitment process.

Our inbox is always open – research@nextgennow.co.uk

WE ARE NEXTGEN

NextGen is a group of pensions professionals promoting fresh ideas and new talent. It's where the next generation of leaders debate, learn and network with each other. It's a force for change in the industry and a space for its members to grow. This happens through the cross-industry mentoring programme, training, showcase events, research and articles spotlighting diverse voices.

We're open to everyone. We amplify original ideas from fresh faces, returners, late-starters and new connections with established figures. Our members and partners are looking to build a smarter, wiser, more productive, innovative and creative pensions industry. An industry that represents savers more fairly and does more to help them reach better outcomes in retirement.

We look for places where the industry needs our original research to move the conversation forward, particularly around diversity of thought, inclusion and the case for supporting the next generation.

Our Research & Insights sub-committee commissions and collates research to further NextGen's goals. They develop social insights related to diversification of thought, age and demographic positioning within the industry, attitudes towards long-term and medium-term saving, generational shifts, and innovation.

We want this document to act as the start of some conversations, not the end of them; please let us know if this sparks any changes to your recruitment process.

THERE ARE LOTS OF WAYS TO GET INVOLVED...



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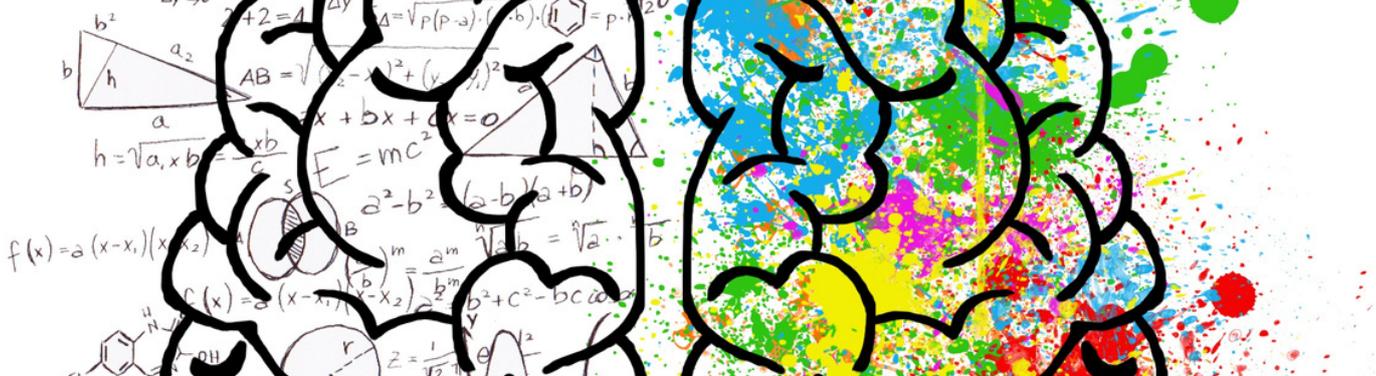
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OUR KEY QUESTIONS, HYPOTHESES AND AREAS OF FOCUS FOR EXPLORATION

Our research provided so much potential evidence that we needed to limit our scope to make the conclusions from the report manageable and actionable. We've restricted the evidence on which we rely to the areas we identified as actionable by the pensions industry.

We've used the following key questions as our guide for focus:

- 1. Is the pensions industry already talking about using the recruitment process to improve diversity?**
- 2. What can existing evidence tell us about recruitment for cognitive diversity?**
- 3. What lessons can the pensions industry learn so that recruitment for the next generation is successful?**

One of the hypotheses we wished to test was confirmed almost immediately; we found very little discussion and distillation of findings from the pensions industry. Many of our conclusions need further testing to uncover the full extent of their value for the industry. However, many excellent sources of general evidence are available, and we rely heavily on these in this report.



THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The case for change and innovation in recruitment in pensions is easily made by some of the evidence we've gathered in our own research of NextGen members. **Approximately 30% of respondents said they did not feel represented** by the pensions industry and approximately another 40% said they only felt somewhat represented.

When asked for any comments, our respondents did not hold back:

“As a female millennial I feel grossly underrepresented. I'm operational and have time and time again been denied operational roles for the same position to be given to an older, less qualified, less experienced male.”

“It's a long way behind the rest of the world, and will suffer for it.”

“I feel sometimes there is an air of box ticking.”

“Many still don't even acknowledge the problem.”

“I haven't met many women like me in the pensions industry at any level.”

“I feel there is a lot of waiting and not enough action or people taking a risk with ideas.”



But this is a wider issue than just the pension industry. It can be harder to get an entry level job than it is to get into elite educational institutions, flying completely in the face of received wisdoms.

There are lots of reasons for this, and we don't wish to over-generalise, but it's compelling information that should cause us all to pause and reflect. Especially since the pandemic is likely to only lengthen the odds for those starting out in a career in pensions. These effects are likely to 'bite' the candidate throughout the process, in a typical scenario:

- They'll discount themselves for job descriptions that are full of jargon, or set unrealistic expectations about the job
- At cover letter and CV sifting they won't immediately fit the bill or use the right buzzwords
- During interviews they'll be less practised and polished
- Finally, if they even get this far, they're far more likely to be exploited at offer stage either by design or due to lack of comparative hires

It's easy to see why experience is valued so highly for some roles, but for others it's more difficult to understand. We argue that we need to consider whether the benefits of hiring new and different voices outweigh significant experience in more circumstances than not. Employees can gain experience, they cannot gain a different voice. Less experienced and/or different voices have value, represent a huge swathe of pension scheme members and should be heard. **And to hear them, you need to hire them!**

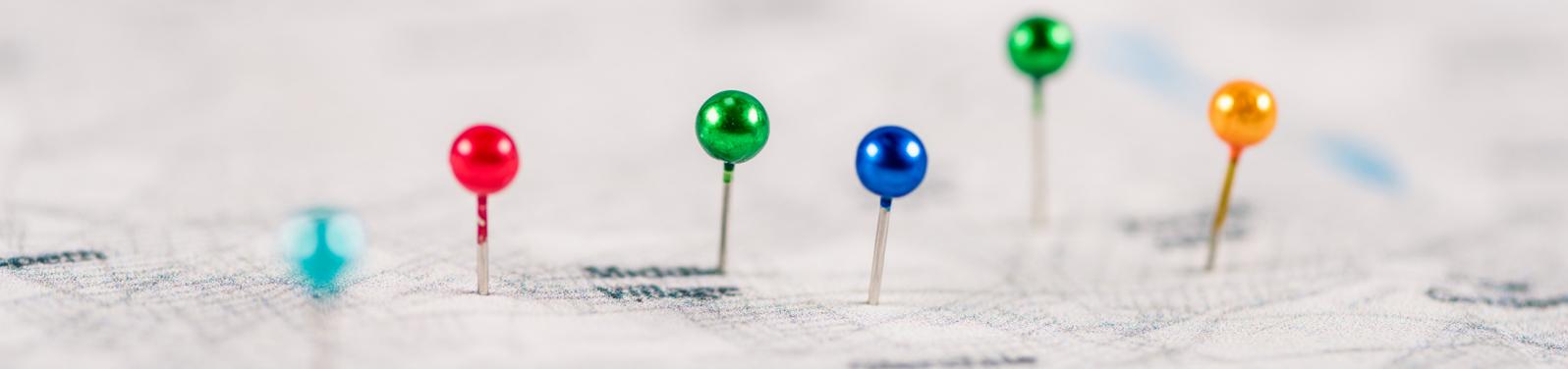
2.6 percent of Walmart applicants made it through, as opposed to 6.1 percent for Harvard University¹



This document does not replace advice from professionals on the specifics of hiring and retaining a cognitively diverse workforce. Instead it's intended to act as, we believe, one of the first literature reviews of its kind; by beginning the process of collecting together lessons from around the world and from different industries we hope to begin to influence the way that the UK pensions industry recruits in a diversity-conscious way. By providing relevant examples we hope to provide cases that may be informative or illustrative and therefore merit further consideration by those who are interested in exploring these issues further.

We are not experts – but we hope that this document can begin a conversation and inform debate.

[1] Ashley Lutz, "Applicants for jobs at the new DC Walmart face worse odds than people trying to get into Harvard," Business Insider, November 19, 2013, [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com).



THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

ADVERTISING



- Attracting the right candidates
- Pitfalls to avoid

APPLYING



- CVs and covering letters
- Alternatives to traditional methods

ASSESSING



- Interviews and tests
- Alternatives to traditional methods

ACCEPTING



- Offering roles to successful candidates
- Final negotiations



Our report begins in Chapter One **the start of the recruitment process** – attracting applicants – where we conclude that putting in the work up-front can pay dividends in the end. In some ways we find that this is one of the most important stages in the process of improving the outcomes from recruitment processes.

Chapter Two covers **sifting of applicants** including evidence of different techniques ranging from traditional CV sifts, right through to innovative assessments reliant on advancements in technology. Our conclusions encourage bravery in those that are running these kinds of processes and highlight that unconscious bias training is not the magic bullet to avoiding bias.

Our penultimate chapter covers **interviews, psychometric tests and other ‘next stage’ recruitment procedures**, and what the available evidence tells us about successful and unsuccessful approaches. As one of the stages that are most fraught with potential issues of bias, we spend some time considering it within this report. We find that this is one of the most difficult areas to research and therefore ‘correct’ in an evidence-based way. We call for much more active testing and research, particularly in the pensions industry, so that we can learn more.

Chapter Four, the final chapter in our report, summarises the evidence we’ve gathered on the importance of the final stage of recruitment, a stage that is often overlooked; **the making of and accepting of job offers**. We cover the final hurdles for a successful outcome and conclude that the right offer for the right candidate is very significant in achieving the best possible conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE: ATTRACTING APPLICANTS

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CHAPTER TWO: SIFTING & SORTING CANDIDATES

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CHAPTER THREE: ASSESSING & INTERVIEWING

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CHAPTER FOUR: NEGOTIATING & ACCEPTING

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HINTS & TIPS

ATTRACTING APPLICANTS

- Do: include truly essential skills only
- Do: Include salary ranges, flexible working options and benefits up-front
- Do: Work with local colleges and offer work experience to broaden the variety of people you engage with
- Do: Look with differences in mind, even if the role is specialised
- ✗ Don't: Include niche requirements or qualifications unless you have to

SIFTING & SORTING CANDIDATES

- Do: Be aware of unconscious bias.
Blind CVs help employers concentrate on other areas of the application but they don't remove bias, so keep an open mind when reviewing CVs
- Do: Be brave! Don't be scared to use other screening methods.
CVs and cover letters are universal approaches but they don't have to be the only options. Question forms and task-based tests can offer a broader picture.
- Do: Increase the diversity of your pool.
If you do, you'll likely increase the diversity of your hires. Consider reviewing the balance of your pool before reviewing individual candidates within it.



ASSESSING & INTERVIEWING

- Do: Make sure you're organised and consistent.
Ask the same questions, use the same tone and the same manner for all interviews.
- Do: Use a diverse interview panel.
Make sure different levels and role types are involved in the interview and selection.
- Do: Level the playing field
Use different tests and exercises designed to genuinely put candidates through their paces, testing specific skills needed for the role.

NEGOTIATING & ACCEPTING

- Do: Ask for feedback about the process
- Do: Stay transparent and timely
- Do: Identify the candidate's motive – it may not just be money!

CHAPTER ONE – ATTRACTING APPLICANTS

First, we should be careful to contextualise the circumstances in which potential applicants search for and interact with new opportunities. New jobs are rarely ‘advertised’ in a traditional sense in the UK, with the exception of very select and highly paid or specialist roles in newspapers and trade press. These methods are almost by definition ‘selective’ in their readership though this should come as no surprise to anyone.

Increasingly, roles are shared on LinkedIn and twitter and are therefore theoretically much more accessible to a wider potential pool of applicants. But is this true in practice?

And what about job descriptions? These are one of the best tools that hiring organisations use to attract potential applicants in the pensions industry just the same as any other. Can these work against applicants and if so, how? Have a look at the Quietroom case study to see how simple, smart changes to a job description transform the number and profile of people who apply.

It’s also important to consider what career stage you are hiring for. Graduate and early career hiring is an opportunity for employers to be imaginative about their requirements. There’s no need for applicants to have significant experience – if they do, then they’re too experienced for the role. Being able to hire based on enthusiasm and interest in the role means employers can reach a much broader range of candidates.

Research has shown that securing some job roles is even harder than getting a place at Harvard.² Be realistic about expected levels of experience, everyone had to start somewhere.

Where do your candidates search? How can you find them?

LinkedIn’s data found that women are less likely to rely on their networks and more likely to search for jobs on third-party websites and online job boards.³

LinkedIn may give the illusion of a greater reach to otherwise untapped networks, but in practice it may work as many ‘old boys clubs’ do; **We tend to know other people just like ourselves on LinkedIn in exactly the same way we do in the rest of our lives.**

Consider which third-party websites and online job boards might give your job advert the broadest relevant reach. Entry level jobs posted on a non-industry specific third-party website rather than in the trade press are more likely to attract a broad range of candidates who are genuinely entry level candidates.

[2] <https://www.businessinsider.in/careers/10-things-that-are-harder-to-get-into-than-harvard/slidelist/46773632.cms#slideid=46773641>

[3] [Workplace Diversity Through Recruitment - A Step-By-Step Guide | Ideal](#)

LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

Evidence suggests that ‘requirements’ and other minimum hurdles for jobs can be off-putting for candidates. They should be as honest and true for the needs of the role as possible and ‘preferred’ items should be avoided. For example, if it’s not truly necessary to have a degree, don’t include the requirement for a degree in the essential criteria. This is likely to become more and more important as hiring practices become less subject to human intervention. Imagine the significance of some of those requirements where they are ‘tested’ only by artificial intelligence screening for certain proxy phrases – potentially none of the candidates will pass the test!⁴

Additionally, certain language can prompt very different reactions from different audiences. Studies have consistently shown that some language is gendered, and this effect is not limited in job descriptions either. Using masculine-type words like ‘ambitious’ and ‘dominate’ is less appealing to female applicants.⁵

And gender diversity is important. 2017 data showed that top-quartile companies on executive-level gender diversity worldwide had a 21% likelihood of outperforming their fourth-quartile industry peers on EBIT margin, and they also had a 27% likelihood of outperforming fourth-quartile peers on longer-term value creation, as measured using an economic-profit (EP) margin.⁶ That all sounds a little complicated, but the bottom line is, companies with diverse decision-making boards perform better.

So, can job adverts and descriptions be adapted to become more immediately attractive to women? Making language more female centric does not discourage men but more male centric language does discourage women.⁷

Also, consider how some other elements of the job that might be possible but not necessary, such as international travel, may be perceived by people at different stages in their life.

[4] [Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong \(hbr.org\)](#).

[5] [Workplace Diversity Through Recruitment – A Step-By-Step Guide | Ideal](#) [BETTER SOURCE NEEDED]

[6] Vivian Hunt, Sara Prince, Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle and Lareina Yee, ‘Delivering growth through diversity’, McKinsey & Company, (2018).

[7] <https://fifewomenleaders.com/#:-:text=The%20Hampton%20Alexander%20Review%20was%20an%20independent%2C%20voluntary%20and%20business%2C%20from%202016%2D2020>.

A SNAPSHOT - 'SOME INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL'

To illustrate how seemingly innocuous phrases in job descriptions may impact the degree to which an applicant feels they are suitable, we'll use a classic example as an illustration. Many job descriptions include generalised copy-and-paste type stock phrases such as 'some international travel'. As we all know, this is not particularly informative but also is so standardised that it may be ignored by many applicants or included by employers on the off-chance that the potential for travel is a draw for some applicants.

However, 'some international travel' should not be included as a trite throwaway in a job description. Does it mean 'international travel very rarely required' or 'attendance at international conferences twice a year may be required'? Does it mean 'international travel is potentially possible when you've worked here for several years and your Director would like to reward you with a treat'?

More importantly, all of these descriptions may be referring to the exact same amount of travel days when in actuality they may signal very different travel needs to potential applicants.

For those with caring responsibilities travel may be attractive if it's clear that they could plan for it far enough in advance, whereas it may be a deterrent where travel is required at short notice. Ambiguity may be the preference for the employer, and is of course accurate where it is truly uncertain how much travel is required for the role in question, but those crafting job descriptions should think hard about what they're actually trying to signal with the inclusion of such phrases. It would be better to use clearer, more specific information wherever possible to avoid inadvertently discouraging a broader range of applicants at the first stage.



A PENSIONS CASE STUDY: QUIETROOM LANGUAGE TIPS

Quietroom were asked by a client to help them attract a wider range of applicants to their next member-nominated trustee opening. The demographic that had come forward in the past was narrow, creating the risk of ‘groupthink’ on the trustee board.

Quietroom’s solution: rethink the language in the job ad.

Here are some of the changes Quietroom made:

- Removed long and convoluted sentences
- Reduced focus on the internal process
- Made the main message that the board wanted people to apply
- Reduced the formality of the language
- Made the tone more conversational
- Used “you” to invite someone to picture themselves in the role
- Included training and support available
- Used the active voice
- Used “we” to be more relatable
- Removed military metaphors such as “discharge your duties” and “serve for a term” as these metaphors are typically masculine and send out subtle cues that the job isn’t for women
- Emphasised qualities and characteristics rather than expertise and experience
- Made it clear that responsibilities are spread across the board.

Without advertising the role any more than it had been advertised before, or using any different channels, the difference was huge. Quietroom knew what language or jargon was putting people off and particularly acting as a barrier to attracting a diverse range of applicants.



The results...

It didn’t take an expensive media campaign, flashy imagery, advertising gimmicks or tech solutions. Their solution was to focus first on the language in the job ad. It was a resounding success:

- the number of applicants increased from 60 to 300
- there was an even mix of male and female candidates
- there were more candidates from minority groups.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Much of the above discussion has focused on those areas where evidence suggests that potential candidates are making judgements and assessments as to what kind of individual will be a good fit to apply. This has important wider implications on how information is disseminated about vacancies in the first place.

Traditional routes or routes that you've already considered to market and advertise roles will help you to identify people like yourself; if you've thought about it, someone similar to you will think about it too. It should now go without saying that word of mouth and referrals reinforce the issues we've identified above. Even those routes that might seem to have a wider reach will often be more limited than they first appear under closer scrutiny. For example, to receive a newsletter you have to be on a mailing list – and maybe only certain kinds of people are on mailing lists.

This is particularly true of the pensions press - only those already in the industry are likely to be on those mailing lists so **only advertising there is limiting your potential pool of candidates and the opportunity to bring in fresh thinking from elsewhere.**

Trying to find alternative and innovative channels to share the information about the roles and vacancies will be crucial to reach non-traditional applicants. This is particularly important in certain parts of the industry where certain factors make routes into them or skill sets appear more 'traditional' or 'elitist' in general, even where this perception isn't borne out in reality.

“ Using outdated jargon or incomprehensible language in job adverts can deter some individuals from considering an application. The way an organisation is represented both online and at recruitment fairs has an impact on the type of candidates it attracts. ⁸ ”

[8] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

A SNAPSHOT: AN HONEST JOB DESCRIPTION⁹

The ship, built to carry a crew destined to try to complete the first crossing of the Antarctic never made it there; it was caught for ten months in ice flows before being crushed and leaving all the men stranded on the open ice. Lifeboats were scrambled to get the crew to a remote island, from where the leader travelled a further 800 miles of open ocean to reach help. Famously the whole crew of the Endurance survived.

The crew were hired in a way familiar to all recruiters, a short ad placed in a newspaper. But what did the ad ask for? Five years' worth of expedition skills? A proven track record in problem solving? No.

Instead the ad ran as the following:

'Men wanted for Hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.'

Coincidence that this group pulled together in adversity and didn't mutiny in the case of extreme adversity? Or were they self-selected for the kinds of individuals that were perfectly suited for the job, before they had even submitted the application?

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible working has for the last year become the norm for most organisations in our industry but do not underestimate the value of explicitly stating that a role is flexible in your job adverts.

The Government's Behavioural Insights Team ran an experiment with Indeed to test the impact of nudging employers to state whether a job was flexible. The test covered more than 200,000 job adverts and over 55,000 employers. The nudge resulted in 20% more jobs being advertised as flexible even before Covid. The adverts which stated that a role was flexible received 30% more applications than those that did not.¹⁰ The wider the pool of applicants, the more likely it is that it will include a diverse range of talent.

[9] Inspired by the retelling in the Start With Why Simon Sinek, 2009

[10] <https://equalities.blog.gov.uk/2020/05/29/double-nudge-encourages-employers-to-offer-flexibility-in-turn-boosting-job-application-rates/>



ATTRACTING APPLICANTS: CONCLUSION

Additional work up front pays dividends to attract the 'right' person to apply for any vacancies; even a small amount of thought and care appears to make a significant difference in getting more appropriate people to apply for a role.

Looking closer to home – particularly by promoting internal talent – may well be a simple solution to many of the potential pitfalls that risk tripping recruitment rounds up.

Candidate self-selection can also be exploited by organisations willing to expressly signal their desire for diverse candidates, for example by explaining key skills, behaviours, attitudes and motivations rather than focusing on experience alone. More research is needed in the area of attracting those with specific motivations¹¹ as this could be a key factor when employing those with the likelihood to excel in their new role, regardless of other factors.

Ultimately, intent is crucial, certain roles will require certain experiences and skills but **if you're committed to hiring diversely you have to put the work in.**

HINTS & TIPS

- **Do: include truly essential skills only**
- **Do: Include salary ranges, flexible working options and benefits up-front**
- **Do: Work with local colleges and offer work experience to broaden the variety of people you engage with**
- **Do: Look with differences in mind, even if the role is specialised**
- ✗ **Don't: Include niche requirements or qualifications unless you have to**



[11] https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/a-head-for-hiring_2015-behavioural-science-of-recruitment-and-selection_tcm18-9557.pdf

CHAPTER 2 – SIFTING, SORTING AND CANDIDATE POOLS

Evidence suggests that even something as seemingly innocuous as screening CVs can present snake pits to the unsuspecting unless considered mindfully and carefully.

CVs are a helpful mechanism for filtering potential candidates as a first step in a recruitment process. In some ways, because they are an almost universally used format of collecting together experience and skills, they can be used as a force for providing a level playing field as a starting point for candidates.

Role of the recruiter

A recruiter can help achieve a more diverse pool of applicants or reinforce your biases. If you are using a recruiter, the following may help to make sure they support rather than hinder your desire for diversity...

- Reject non-diverse shortlists¹²
- Set parameters for the level of diversity required, taking into account local demographics¹³
- Ask for long lists and short lists to be provided with unnecessary data removed until the interview stage¹⁴

Don't judge a book by its cover letter

The process of CV sifting, however, should be approached with caution if hiring managers are interested in achieving true cognitive diversity with the candidates they put forward for the following rounds of the recruitment process. CV sifters are particularly at risk of having their effectiveness inhibited by biases – as interviewers are (discussed further below).

There's evidence suggesting people are unconsciously biased in reviewing people; they like applicants that on some level are similar to themselves. This, sometimes called 'demographic similarity' has been found in respect of age,¹⁵ gender¹⁶ and race.¹⁷

Some examples of similarity perception or the impact of the mere-exposure effect associated with CV sifting include:

- Demographic similarity between recruiters and candidates influence how much a recruiter 'likes' a candidate and therefore their degree of favour towards them when the recruiter perceived the job as desirable themselves¹⁸
- Candidates with unusual or otherwise unfamiliar names to recruiters have a lower likelihood of being hired¹⁹
- Even innocent coincidences, such as where candidates share first names with recruiters, lead recruiters to perceive similar candidates more favourably²⁰

[12] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540066/workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

[13] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540066/workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

[14] *ibid* | [15] Jiang, Hoegg, Dahl & Chattopadhyay, 2010

[16] Antonovics, Arcidiacono & Walsh, 2005; Bagues & Esteve-Volart, 2010; Kaplan, Berkley & Fisher, 2016; Jiang & Wang, 1999

[17] Derous, Ryan & Nguyen, 2012; Lee, Pitesa, Thau & Pillutla, 2015; Millman, 2016; O'Leary, Durham, Weathering, Brennan & Cunningham, 2009

[18] *The Irony of Choice in Recruitment: When Similarity Turns Recruiters to Other Candidates* | Cairn.info

[19] Cotton et al. (2008) | [20] Howard and Kerin (2011)

Additionally, humans have a propensity to 'thin-slice' – that is relying on snippets of behaviour – such as body language, speech and gestures, to judge another person's personality traits. Hiring managers should be careful to reduce any risk that this will happen even in written communication; language selection (as we see further below) can be more of a 'tip off' for recruiters to demographic factors than might be anticipated.

A report by McKinsey has shown that top-quartile companies for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians.²¹ Yet candidates from such backgrounds are more likely to get called back to interview if they "whiten" their CV. For example by "whitening" their name and removing references to activities that might reveal their heritage.

One study found that 25% of black candidates received call-backs when they "whitened" their CVs but only 10% of them received call-backs when they had not done so, despite listing exactly the same qualifications and for Asian candidates a similar result was seen 21% call-backs for "whitened" CVs and 11.5% without.²² The issue was compounded where an employer claimed to be an equal opportunities employer because candidates were less likely to "whiten" their CV yet were still more likely to get a call-back if they did "whiten" their CV.²³

- The study sent out job applications to a range of roles across the UK, including IT Support, IT Technician, Accountant, Accounts Clerk, Human Resources Manager, Teaching Assistant, Care Assistant, Sales Assistant and Office Assistant
- Ethnic identity was conveyed using names commonly associated with the following ethnic groups: black African, black Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and white
- Applications were sent out to the same vacancies with the key indication being whether applicants were called back for an interview
- The net discrimination in favour of white names over equivalent applications from ethnic minority candidates was 29%

This study has been very influential in the way that many companies have approached awareness of unconscious biases in recruitment ever since. Lots of organisations have considered how to remove opportunities to reduce the likelihood that they discount Lakisha and Jamal and always pick Emily and Greg.²⁵

Snapshot: What's in a name?

There have been many studies about discrimination in job applications. The Department for Work and Pensions commissioned a study to understand if ethnic minorities were facing racial discrimination.²⁴

[21] <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
 [21] <http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/facbios/file/Whitening%20MS%20R2%20Accepted.pdf>
 [23] *ibid* | [24] <https://natcen.ac.uk/media/20541/test-for-racial-discrimination.pdf>
 [25] <w9873.pdf> (nber.org).

IS 'BLIND' RECRUITMENT THE BEST APPROACH?

Numerous studies have found that businesses are increasingly undertaking some kind of 'blind' recruitment practice.²⁶ 'No name' CVs and other anonymising tactics are examples of a practice that's very en vogue, but do they really work?

Some are strong proponents of this approach:

- In France anonymous CVs have been mandatory for all companies with more than 50 employees since 2006
- In 2015 EY removed academic and work experience criteria for entry level hires as they found that these have 'zero bearing on outcome'²⁷

Snapshot: Australian civil service

However, others are more sceptical or have found unexpected evidence:

The Australian civil service undertook a blind recruitment approach which was studied and found counterintuitive results; placing a female name on a previously name-blind CV made it 2.9% more likely that the candidate would be selected for interview, whereas a male name was found to reduce the likelihood that they would go through to the next round.²⁸

Snapshot: State Government of Victoria

When the State Government of Victoria trialled anonymised recruiting for two years, it discovered overseas-born job seekers were 8% more likely to be shortlisted, women were 8% more likely to be shortlisted and hired, and applicants from lower socio-economic suburbs were 9.4% more likely to progress through the selection process and receive a job offer.²⁹

[27] Is blind recruitment the secret to the perfect hire? (peoplemanagement.co.uk)
[28] Ibid
[29] <https://ethics.org.au/taking-bias-out-of-recruitment/>

A practical example from the pensions industry

One organisation shared its experience of attempting a blind CV approach with us. It was aware that it had regularly recruited people from the same sort of background and was keen to change this. It implemented a blind CV process to try to get a more cognitively diverse group of candidates through to the interview stage. The result was that more people with the same background got through to the interview stage rather than fewer.

The organisation looked more closely at the CVs to try to work out why this had happened and discovered that the process had not been as 'blind' as they thought. Although names and education history had been left out, there were still a large swathe of indicators as to the background of the applicant in the content of the CV. For example, the awards someone has won, the hobbies they have, their work history (especially at the more junior level) and even the way they express themselves can tell you about the person applying. When the CVs were not blind, the reviewers consciously tried to address their biases (albeit not always successfully) but once the CVs were blind, the assumption was that there was no way to be biased based on a person's background and so no attempt was made to overcome those unconscious biases.

“ While name-blind applications can help secure ethnic minorities (and other disadvantaged groups) an interview, I have heard a number of examples of where it potentially led to greater bias in the interview. Contextualised recruitment can be a useful way of focusing on an applicant's potential, particularly those who may not have had the opportunity to attend a high performing school or university. By taking into account a candidate's economic background and personal circumstances when looking at academic achievements, employers can identify talent and potential that might otherwise be missed.³⁰ ”

Beyond blind – knowing what you know and not what you think you know

Assumptions are often made that, firstly, CV or cover letter sifters know what they're looking for and, secondly, that they know how to do this. But these could be dangerous assumptions to make. Do your sifters really know what skillsets have worked well in the team so far? Or what skills are really needed for the team? And do they know what indicators or proxies they are looking for? What about negative indicators that haven't worked well in the team previously?

It is crucially important that employers can understand what indicators they had for selecting previous successful hires, or factors that are important in their current high performing staff in general. Sifters should understand that they are not necessarily looking to entirely replicate current hires, nor are they deliberately trying to find people with wildly different experience... unless they are, of course! An honest and detailed conversation is likely to pay dividends as the perceptions brought by both candidates and sifters are exposed in stark relief when reviewing paper applications.³¹

[30] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

[31] https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/a-head-for-hiring_2015-behavioural-science-of-recruitment-and-selection_tcm18-9557.pdf

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING

As in many other walks of life, maybe technology is the future?

Technology in the form of online applications, keyword searches and scoring systems have long been used to support the recruitment process. Artificial intelligence (AI) goes several steps further by actually doing part of the job for us. There are examples³² of AI not working as expected or in inadvertently discriminatory ways as the inherent biases in society are ‘taught’ to computers. However, it could be an area to watch as the time saved sifting CVs could be spent coming up with more creative ways to increase the diversity of applicants.

The risks of an average

Studies have sought to unpick the drivers of observed discrimination to understand why discriminatory effects remain. It goes without saying that measuring discrimination is complex, especially where it is covert or subtle. However – within academia several distinct explanations have emerged which are used in studies relating to hiring decisions (among other decisions) to undertake controlled experiments under different theories.

These are:

- **Taste based discrimination:** This theory proposes that discrimination persists because it is rooted in preferences which may in turn be driven by animus or prejudice
- **Statistical discrimination:** Rational beliefs about average differences in skills or abilities, for example based on age, education or gender
- **Belief-based discrimination:** A subset of statistical discrimination which is based on inaccurate ‘average’ beliefs, for example on the basis of stereotypes or extreme one-off experiences

This represents an interesting challenge for AI or machine learning-style solutions. Some examples of poorly designed AI can result in a sort of spiral into more and more discriminatory outcomes inadvertently, as was famously found in a series of early AI-based criminal sentencing trials and predictive algorithms trialled by law enforcement agencies around the world in the late 2010s.³³

[32] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-amazon-com-jobs-automation-insight/amazon-scraps-secret-ai-recruiting-tool-that-showed-bias-against-women-idUSKCN1MK08G>

[33] To read further information see, for example: AI is sending people to jail – and getting it wrong, MIT Technology Review.

A low-tech alternative to AI – deeper or wider pools

One shortcut to using sophisticated AI techniques may in fact be quite simple; using a ‘tool in the pool’ trick. If you include two people with a certain protected characteristic in a pool of candidates you’ll be twice as likely to hire a person with that characteristic, correct? In fact, the impact is likely to be disproportionately positive. Evidence suggests that if you have two females or two minorities in a pool, one of them is likely to be hired 79 times and 194 times more, respectively.³⁴ This is an enormous effect and so should not be underestimated as a quick way to normalise and encourage the hiring of a more diverse workforce.

COVER LETTERS, MOTIVATIONAL STATEMENTS AND WRITTEN EXERCISES

Cover letters and other motivational statements are often used by employers to supplement CVs. Some of the more innovative employers are using these kinds of approaches instead of CV submissions in order to help sift applicants at the first stage, which helps to place all candidates on more of an even playing field and reduces biases for traditional flags of privilege such as education.³⁵

Written exercises can also betray the biases of the assessor when combined with other information about a candidate; assessors will look for markers of competence or incompetence based on their understanding of the abilities demonstrated by, for example, the CV.³⁶

Pre-interview tests should not be relied on too heavily or unduly influence further stages of the application process as interviewers, for example, can be influenced by a successful written exercise or a specific example raised in a motivational statement and seek to confirm their prior impression.³⁷

Getting this stage right can build confidence among applicants that you are measuring them fairly. For example, one firm currently runs a recruitment process where the first stage is a short questionnaire with no name, gender or CV disclosed. In fact, they do not ask candidates for their CVs until the third stage of the process. Whilst there were further stages including a group assessment, case study and general aptitude interview, the fairness of the approach stood out.

One of their candidates told us that it “was really refreshing to know that for most of the process I was being evaluated on aptitude rather than network or prior experience” by contrast the candidate found that applying to similar firms they were left with the “sense that many of the open positions are filled by people the [firms] already knew.”

[34] [Why Employers Favor Men - HBS Working Knowledge](#) | [35] <https://octopusventures.com/insights/building-teams/unbiased-hiring/>
[36] <https://www.thecut.com/2014/05/kill-the-cover-letter-and-rsum.html>
[37] [Djiboje, Fontenelle, and Gamer \(1984\)](#)



SIFTING, SORTING AND CANDIDATE POOLS: CONCLUSION

Fixing issues at this stage is difficult to do and there is no silver bullet. Shortcuts and rules of thumb – such as anonymising CVs – may be impactful, but are unlikely to be the whole solution.

Efforts which go further than traditional methods of gathering information on which to sift candidates beyond CV and cover letter may improve cognitive diversity and the quality of candidates taken on to the next stage of recruitment.

But, employers should also really know and understand what they want before they start rejecting applicants on the basis of pieces of paper. The risks of misdiagnosing both the needs of the organisation and the benefits of different candidates are high at this stage, and due care should be taken.

HINTS & TIPS

➤ **Do: Be aware of unconscious bias.**

Blind CVs help employers concentrate on other areas of the application but they don't remove bias, so keep an open mind when reviewing CVs

➤ **Do: Be brave! Don't be scared to use other screening methods.**

CVs and cover letters are universal approaches but they don't have to be the only options. Question forms and task-based tests can offer a broader picture.

➤ **Do: Increase the diversity of your pool.**

If you do, you'll likely increase the diversity of your hires. Consider reviewing the balance of your pool before reviewing individual candidates within it.





CHAPTER 3 – INTERVIEWS, PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS, GROUP EXERCISES...

From here poor decisions can have even more significant implications. Any lack of diversity imported from the earlier stages will be compounded without a thoughtful approach.

Look before you leap

Discussing what you are actually looking for in candidates before meeting any may be a key step to recruitment success that is overlooked by many hiring managers. Evidence suggests that focusing on the behaviours and attitudes exhibited by previous or current high performers, may significantly reduce the likelihood of hiring candidates that end up being the wrong fit.³⁸ It will also directly reduce the cognitive diversity of your team – you already have high performers with those attributes so think about what your team does not yet have.

Meet the candidate

Not all interviews are made equal. We all know this and have experienced it, often on both sides of the table. It's worth reiterating some of the ways to minimise the impact of bias inherent in interviewing.

- First impressions are difficult to overcome, so introducing elements of 'blindness' to interviews could be important³⁹
- Ask the same questions of every candidate. Asking different questions leads to unfair assessments⁴⁰

- Resist social chit chat as this risks warming to candidates on the basis of shared privileges⁴¹
- Extroverts are likely to be perceived favourably in interview scenarios. Introverts may take longer to answer questions as they need longer for reflection⁴² and extroverts exhibit behaviours such as fast speech rate and being talkative which are rated as competent, smarter and more likable⁴³
- Beware of charm or other impression management that candidates might display⁴⁴

It is also important to think about the interview panel itself. The diversity of the interview panel can help balance out unconscious bias and is something to consider.⁴⁵

[38] [Look Beyond The CV \(linkedin.com\)](#). | [39] Attractiveness, for example, often has a significant impact on perceptions of effectiveness.
[40] [Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong \(hbr.org\)](#). Bragger et al., 2002; Kutcher & Bragger, 2004; Dipboye, 1994; Grant, 2013
[41] [Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong \(hbr.org\)](#). | [42] Cain, 2012 | [43] Condon, 2015 | [44] Peeters and Lievens (2006)
[45] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594336/race-in-workplace-mcgregor-smith-review.pdf

Interviews are where biases really start to hurt candidates

Biases are difficult to combat against fully⁴⁶, but bringing a greater awareness to the possibility of unconscious bias enables interviewers to challenge their thought process, even where they can't be overcome completely.

These are some of the very common biases which can reduce the likelihood of hiring the most appropriate person for the role.

- **Affinity bias:** Those we consider as being similar to us are viewed more favourably
 - Practical example: Showing clear preference for candidates from the same university as you
- **Conformity bias:** Inadvertently tending to search for information that reinforces your existing view about certain aspects of the candidate
 - Practical example: A candidate's CV mentioned a company you have good experience of working with. Undoubtedly you'll ask the candidate about it, just to cement your own preconceptions about that company, reinforcing ideas that you had about the employees that work there
- **Contrast effect:** Our natural tendency to compare and contrast
 - Practical example: You have spent all morning interviewing older candidates that are more mature than your team currently, you interview someone of the same approximate age of the team but you remember this person as 'young' the next day
- **Halo effect:** A first favourable impression sticks
 - Practical example: An interview starts with a pleasurable exchange of chit chat about your similar ties. Despite a very average interview performance you believe the candidate's personable manner suggests that they are highly competent
- **Horn effect:** An unfavourable characteristic or behaviour overshadows further positive indicators because you link it to a previous past negative experience with someone who shares that characteristic
 - Practical example: you were bullied at school by someone very tall and unconsciously associate other very tall people with that negative experience

Attractiveness can have a significant impact on not only first impressions, but also perception of likely effectiveness of candidates.

We have all heard previous findings that attractive people are often treated favourably in all social aspects of life, however there is some evidence to suggest that attractiveness works against candidates in selection for jobs; attractive male candidates are perceived as more likely 'threats' to interviewers whereas attractive women are perceived as less intelligent.⁴⁷

These kinds of behavioural biases cannot be eliminated. They will still likely impact the way we interact with and feel about candidates for roles. But, by being aware of them, you can refocus your discussion on more objective matters.

[46] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaaganwaleurope/2018/10/19/how-can-bias-during-interviews-affect-recruitment-in-your-organisation/#6a7fb0fa1951>

[47] Lee. When beauty helps and when it hurts.pdf (ucl.ac.uk).

SNAPSHOT: SHABBY SCIENTISTS AND BAD BANKERS

The Social Mobility Commission undertook a review to better understand why people from privileged backgrounds are overrepresented in life sciences and front office investment banking in the UK. The Commission's findings are quite damning of some recruitment practices and, particularly of how informal interview practices can have terrible outcomes for delivering a more diverse workforce.

Some of the findings are worth reproducing in full here as an example of how poor practice in interviewing – even after a highly formalised recruitment process – can undo the 'fairness' of the process overall, and lead to a severely limited workforce in respect of their socioeconomic diversity.

A relatively high level of formality at pre-screening often gives way to a relatively high level of informality with respect to final decision making, where hiring managers have a tendency to recruit for familiarity and similarity, and focus on perceived 'fit.' This combination of formality at pre-screening, and informality with respect to final selection decisions, could mount particular challenges for candidates from non-privileged backgrounds. This is particularly the case since the concept of 'fit' is often determined by whether aspirant bankers share a social or educational background with current hiring managers. It is though important to underline that the precise impact of these processes varies within and between banks, with some offering a wider range of opportunities to people from diverse backgrounds than others.⁴⁸



SNAPSHOT: OPPOSITES DON'T ATTRACT

Extensive empirical evidence supports the effect of the attraction paradigm; for example, individuals expect that the more similar they are to others, the more they will be liked by them.⁴⁹ Moreover, when people share characteristics such as sex, birthdate, name or initials, they are more willing to trust and work with those with whom they share these characteristics.⁵⁰

[48] [Socio-economic diversity in life sciences and investment banking.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[49] Condon & Crano, 1988

[50] Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado & Anderson, 2004; Jiang et al., 2010; Miller, Downs & Prentice 1998; Polman, Pollmann & Poehlman, 2013)

IS UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING THE SOLUTION?

Many firms have implemented unconscious bias training for those involved in the hiring process. This is a helpful step to make people aware of the issue of unconscious bias and perhaps help participants identify some of their unconscious biases but it is important that both firms and participants acknowledge its limitations. **It is not enough on its own to eliminate unconscious bias.**⁵¹

- Two hours of training will not identify all of a person's unconscious biases
- For real change reinforcement is required
- Just like any other skill, without practice, counteracting unconscious bias will not be as effective
- Bias mitigation can back-fire if participants do not agree with the way they are being influenced⁵²
- There is currently limited unconscious bias training interventions focused on biases unrelated to gender or race⁵³
- The training is not generally designed to combat explicit bias⁵⁴

Test the candidate

'Raw talent' recruitment (such as school leaver recruitment) has often favoured intelligence, psychometric, personality and other kinds of testing. These have repeatedly been found to be effective ways of assessing candidates on multiple factors,⁵⁵ and yet they are often underused by employers in other scenarios. Why?

Some of the largest companies in the world are moving away from traditional assessment methods. McKinsey & Company now run a 'digital gamified assessment' intended to test innate problem solving schemes regardless of background and previous experience.⁵⁶ One of the successful candidates explained that "the game is about understanding a complex situation, determining influencing factors and dynamics, testing a few hypotheses and eventually developing an approach to solve for the game objective".⁵⁷

He went on to comment, "In a way, I forgot I was doing an assessment. It was quite fun to play".⁵⁸ Is this the new frontier of candidate assessment, without some of the biases?

Many organisations look to test their candidates on 'real world' problems as part of their interview process. Some of these, such as Citadel's 'decathlon' method,⁵⁹ online appetite tests run for trainee Air Traffic Controllers with NATS⁶⁰ and several famous intelligence agencies worldwide, are highly involved and on a truly massive scale. However, cheaper and more home-grown options are available; could your team design a short exercise that would be a creative way of putting candidates through their paces or use an existing model available through many of the more innovative recruitment providers?

However, issues remain. For example, there are companies that look to assess candidates on the basis of factors like 'cultural fit' by selecting previous high performers within an organisation and measuring potential factors against behaviours they exhibit. But those hiring employees should be wary of their past culture being used as a yardstick of 'good' culture.⁶¹

[51] How effective is unconscious bias training? A review of the evidence, Doyin Atewologun, Tinu Cornish and Fatima Tresh, Equality and Human Rights Commission - <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-113-unconscious-bias-training-an-assessment-of-the-evidence-for-effectiveness-pdf.pdf> [52] *ibid* | [53] *ibid* | [54] *ibid* | [55] <https://www.thecut.com/2014/05/kill-the-cover-letter-and-rsum.html> [56] [McKinsey Problem Solving Game | Careers | McKinsey & Company](#), | [57] [My experience with the McKinsey Problem Solving Game | McKinsey & Company](#), | [58] *ibid* | [59] [Hedge funds hiring from resumes are making a horrible mistake | FinancialCareers](#), [60] [Trainee Air Traffic Controllers - NATS](#) | [61] [Your Approach to Hiring Is All Wrong | hbr.org](#).



INTERVIEWS, PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS, GROUP EXERCISES: **CONCLUSION**

This is both one of the hardest stages of the recruitment process to research, and one of the hardest areas to correct without research to evidence a new approach.

It appears that trialling different approaches and learning from what has worked in previous recruitment rounds is important for honing this stage, and different approaches needed for different kinds of hires. There's also a certain need for pragmatism; biases are hard to address universally and the degree to which it's possible to do so at this stage will require care and dedication.

HINTS & TIPS

> Do: Make sure you're organised and consistent

Ask the same questions, use the same tone and the same manner for all interviews.

> Do: Use a diverse interview panel

Make sure different levels and role types are involved in the interview and selection.

> Do: Level the playing field

Use different tests and exercises designed to genuinely put candidates through their paces, testing specific skills needed for the role.



CHAPTER 4 – MAKING AND ACCEPTING JOB OFFERS

So, the hiring manager is satisfied, the fit looks likely to be successful... now just to make the job offer. Easy, right?

Some factors that could be included in final stages of job offers may be more important than they first appear. 39% of all respondents to a recent McKinsey survey say they have turned down or decided not to pursue a job because of a perceived lack of inclusion at an organisation.⁶²

This stage of the recruitment process is often overlooked, or at least due care and attention is not taken, given its potential significance. We all know those who, on the receipt of a job offer, report a sense of relief or confusion rather than a sense of delight. Why is this? And could this be something to do with diversity and inclusion factors?

[62] McKinsey & Company, 'Understanding organizational barriers to more inclusive workplace: Survey results' (2020)

BARGAINING AND NEGOTIATING

Women are much less likely to negotiate on pay when faced with a male decision maker, at least in part because the ‘social cost’ of doing so is much higher than it is for men.⁶³ Two separate studies, one in Australia⁶⁴ and one in North America⁶⁵ found that women do ask for more money as often as men but they get it less frequently than men do.⁶⁶

So where does the assumption that women don’t ask come from? A significant part of this is that older studies did not factor in that women are far more likely than men to have jobs where negotiation is not really possible e.g. low skilled hourly jobs and part time roles.⁶⁷ In addition, many employers still ask for previous salaries which can be useful for context, but risks focusing on an employee’s career history rather than their new role and responsibilities. In turn this can risk locking in pay disparities⁶⁸ and reducing the ability for women to negotiate.

Certain strategies and even negotiating scripts have been proffered as solutions to helping women to negotiate in a way that doesn’t cost them so highly. These same scripts aren’t found to have any impact on the cost associated with negotiating for men; women are just treated differently. It is therefore vital that hiring managers and those with the power to make decisions on pay, acknowledge and counteract the bias.

Social ties have also been found to have an impact on negotiation.⁶⁹ Knowing people at an organisation or even a similar organisation is invaluable for candidates, as it allows them to gather information which is not publicly available. Companies rarely share internal information about pay bands but knowing salary information before a negotiation allows candidates to pitch much more effectively.

Minorities have been found to have less social ties and therefore worse negotiation outcomes than their majority counterparts.⁷⁰ These findings show how important it is to actively increase diversity in the workplace, without significant changes inequalities are likely to persist.

It will not always be possible to increase the salary on offer but that does not necessarily mean that you cannot make your offer more attractive. **Salary is rarely the sole motivator for someone accepting a job offer so consider highlighting other perks and wellbeing benefits that you offer.**

For example, one organisation we spoke to struggled to retain women so they changed their maternity policy to make it more financially feasible for women to stay. They then realised that this policy could be used to attract women, not just retain them, by helping them stand out from their competitors.

[63] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749597806000884> | [64] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContributorStored=Oswald%2C+Andrew+> | [65] <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#> | [66] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContributorStored=Oswald%2C+Andrew+AND> <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#> | [67] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContributorStored=Oswald%2C+Andrew+> | [68] <https://www.robertwalters.co.uk/content/dam/robert-walters/country/united-kingdom/files/whitepapers/Driving-Diversity-and-Inclusion-in-the-Workplace-Gender.pdf> | [69] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2307/2666977> | [70] <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2307/2666977>

UNDERSELLING YOUR CANDIDATE AND THE COMPETITION

Speaking generally, the more people know about a role the more likely they are to accept. Meeting colleagues, visiting offices and ease of communication all contribute to making a decision.⁷¹

Women who tell their prospective employer of an alternative job offer are, however, potentially risking penalty; not in terms of their pay as they are just as likely as men to achieve a better salary as a result of this, but instead in terms of the perspective that their future colleague might have of them. Testing showed managers are less likely to want to work with women who have attempted to negotiate on this basis.⁷²

We know from the Howard versus Heidi⁷³ study that biases exist when women are assertive and this in turn can be internalised. As a society it's our role to challenge this bias, but in the meantime employers should be aware that different people may approach negotiations differently and do their best to level the playing field.

The ethnicity pay gap remains stubbornly high in the UK.⁷⁴ Some of this effect is likely to stem right back to original pay offers. The gender pay gap is so persistent because it's compounded as low pay persists throughout a career. Wherever possible, steps should be taken to offer equal pay for equal work right from the beginning.

[71] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/hrm.10062> | [72] <https://hbr.org/2014/06/why-women-dont-negotiate-their-job-offers>
[73] <https://www.leadershippsychologyinstitute.com/women-the-leadership-labyrinth-howard-vs-heidi/>
[74] <https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucs-ethnicity-and-gender-pay-gap-2020>

CASE STUDY: ITV TRUSTEE BOARD

How do you build a great Trustee Board?

Creative communications agency like minds recently worked with Kate Robinson from Outlaw Communications, who delivered ITV's previous DB MND campaign, to create a digital campaign that conveyed this message to members of ITV's DC Plan. It aimed to keep the focus on diversity and inclusion, but without the usual array of campaign tools and events to reinforce it.

The challenge

ITV recently had two vacancies for their DC Plan. The company has been focused on D&I in this area for about five years now, and three years ago, we worked with the Pensions Team to create a trustee recruitment campaign that was based around the question 'What does a Trustee look like?'

We had fun with creating vinyl photo frames for bathroom mirrors, and posters where this strapline paired with mirrored elements. The idea was that a pension plan member could see a reflection of themselves alongside the strapline question, and make the connection between themselves and the pension trustee role.

In the current circumstances, ITV asked us to support them in developing a campaign that kept the emphasis on diversity, inclusion and belonging, but in a very different world to the last time the Board had vacancies.

The concept

ITV provided a clear steer to shape the concept and campaign development: we don't want to build a Trustee Board where everyone is the same. The objective was to build a Board that represents ITV's diverse membership, with people who are committed to the role, and not afraid to speak up and get involved. The sense of belonging was a key element of ITV's brief to us: members and potential applicants should feel that they are applying to be part of a team. We worked with ITV on that basis, creating concept ideas that met that objective and refining those based on their feedback.

When it comes to building a strong team, the more diverse it is, the stronger it will be. After all, if The Beatles had been made up of four John Lennons, would they have been as good? If you got a fruit salad with only oranges in it, wouldn't you feel a bit short-changed? ITV's steer for the concept development was always that a diverse team is greater than the sum of its parts.

So, keeping that in mind, the first thing we agreed with ITV was: what do we want a member to think, feel and do when they get these communications?



like minds

[72] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/hrm.10062> | [73] <https://hbr.org/2014/06/why-women-dont-negotiate-their-job-offers>
 [74] <https://www.leadershippsychologyinstitute.com/women-the-leadership-labyrinth-howard-vs-heidi/>
 [75] <https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucs-ethnicity-and-gender-pay-gap-2020>

What does ITV want a member to...

...think?

'I thought I knew what a Trustee looked like, and I didn't fit the bill. But maybe things are different - I want to find out more about the role of MND and have the opportunity to make a difference.'

...feel?

Like they're starting on a level playing field. We also want them to feel encouraged and excited by the opportunity, and by the idea that their personal qualities are what make a difference to the team.

...do?

Apply, and feel good about it.

The solution

It was important that the communication deliverables were well balanced. On the one hand they would need to give enough information about the role to potential candidates who would progress to the interview stage, but at the same time wouldn't discourage people who might be turned off by pension jargon.

Outlaw Communications and like minds created materials including:

- Postcards for deferred members of the Plan and those on leave
- A series of e-cards for active members of the Plan
- A specifically created website with a countdown clock and clear, easy-to-follow navigation through the steps
- An editable PDF application form for filling in digitally or printing off

Usually, for an MND campaign, ITV would run an all-day training session. This event was run by the Pensions team and the Plan's advisers, to make sure that applicants really understood the role of a trustee.

Instead, we worked to come up with solutions for the issues that social distancing has created and make the experience an online one instead. We utilized previous videos that Outlaw Communications had created for the DB MND campaign, and Kate facilitated the live recording of a Trustee webcast on Zoom to get some real-time feedback on being a Trustee both in normal, and pandemic circumstances. The Plan advisers and ITV's pension team created Zoom presentations on investments, the legal framework, governance, and how the Plan works.

A campaign like this should be inclusive, warm, and open – especially with the usual human element of an MND campaign somewhat removed by COVID restrictions. Kate created content for the site that was engaging, clear on both the role and the expectations around it, and accessible. The like minds design team also created a simple navigation through the site so, without the usual support available, next steps and new information was always made clear. The webcast was uploaded halfway through the application window and members were communicated with again to remind them of the deadline and the new content.

The outcome

The process of selecting two new Trustees is still ongoing for ITV, but during the first campaign we ran with ITV, they had 15 applicants (8 men and 7 women based all around the country, all from different levels and areas of the business). In this remote digital campaign, that final number of applicants was 8 but, again with a good gender, location and seniority spread. The team at ITV also felt that the process was successful because the feedback they got was that the Trustees immediately felt a sense of belonging, and that they were part of a team.

A lot of things about the pandemic have been incredibly difficult. Creating an MND campaign in a pandemic, where everyone's working from home, takes away some of your usual resources, but it opens up new ways of thinking too. One of the great takeaways for all of us has been that we've learned to be more flexible, more understanding and more aware of other people's accessibility challenges. That's only a good thing and has opened up more opportunities for taking trustee recruitment campaigns forward.



MAKING AND ACCEPTING JOB OFFERS: CONCLUSION

This is hardly the 'easy bit' of recruitment that it often appears to hiring employers. All of the effort leading to this point can be lost with some misjudgement.

Underselling candidates – lowballing them in terms of pay or benefits at this last stage – can be highly damaging to the relationship for years to come. Or, indeed, mean that the relationship goes no further at all.

Where employers can genuinely approach this stage with an intention to negotiate for the best outcome for all parties this is likely to pay dividends, and all should acknowledge that this can come with costs on both sides.

The report takes readers through the recruitment process step by step. One organisation which has thought through all areas of recruitment for their trustee board is ITV. Pension boards are notoriously difficult to recruit for, requiring specialist skills and experience for a role which is both time consuming and comes with legal responsibilities. With the support of communications consultancy Like Minds, ITV worked hard to think outside the box and create a recruitment process which is inclusive and dare it be said – fun!

HINTS & TIPS

- Do: Ask for feedback about the process
- Do: Stay transparent and timely
- Do: Ask for candidates motivations – it may not only be about money!



CONCLUSION

Our report is the start of a long journey for the pensions industry.

Our research has found that there are many lessons we can (and are!) learning from. The evidence has been gathered from around the world about both good and bad practices, and we have gathered case studies from those who have stories to tell about their efforts.

We should be approaching recruitment with a spirit of openness:

- **Openness to try new approaches**

Such as trialling different wording in job adverts, question sets rather than CV sifting, creative assessment exercises, facilitating genuine negotiation at job offer stage and so on.

- **Openness to our own limitations**

We all suffer from biases, but we can collectively agree to be optimistic and positive about the opportunities for us to take action to combat these, relying on support and constructive challenge from others.

- **Openness to learning**

Employers should routinely evaluate every stage of their recruitment practices and take forward not only those elements that have a proven track record, but also those that show promise compared with entrenched approaches.

- **Openness to new voices**

Aspirational organisations should be looking forward, based on a considered knowledge of the successes and failures of the past and include innovative, diverse thinkers as part of this journey.

Employers should also consider the implications of findings beyond the beginning of the journey and throughout someone's career with them. **Ultimately many of these lessons are important not just for recruitment but also, with a retention lens, for job satisfaction, individual motivation and valuing staff for all their qualities.**

Questions remain and we'd like to learn more from practitioners to add to our collective knowledge:

- How do we do more as an industry to improve the overall impression of the pensions industry as a great place to work?
- What other ideas could help improve recruitment of a more diverse workforce?

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We would like to continue the conversation with those in the pensions industry that we haven't yet heard from. We want to hear stories from those that have had successes, those that have fallen at the first hurdle, and those that don't know where to start.

Add to the industry's collective knowledge and let us know what happened when you tried one of the hints and tips: research@nextgennow.co.uk



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