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Diversity Roundtable

Kindly hosted by PwC

February 2019

Introduction

What level of responsibility should the recruitment industry have to ensure that the process for finding the best talent is equitable? This the question that was asked of our round table attendees in February 2019. To help ensure diversity of thought, we gathered people from many different groups to help with the outputs both on the day and for refinement following the event. We're incredibly grateful to those who gave up their time for this research.

Attendees

Joanne Lockwood - Transgender Awareness and Inclusion Specialist (via voice conf)
Lucy Hobbs - The Future is ND Founder
Yasmin Sheikh - Diverse Matters Founder
Karen Beardsell - ex HRD of Stonewall and HR consultant
Josh Clarke - Occumi Founder, Diversity Champion and Graduate Recruitment specialist
Ingrid Marsh - Women's Empowerment Speaker and Coach
Mark Mesiti – PwC Senior Business Manager
Fay Couchman – PwC Global Relationship Manager
Vickie Collinge – Account Manager BlueSkyPR
Sarah Wild – Changeboard

Additional Refinement By

Sulaiman Khan - ThisAbility - founder and Chief Purpose Officer
Jane Hatton - Evenbreak Director

Special thanks to Sarah Wild from Changeboard for covering the outputs.

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The Process

To uncover the key insights, the process for recruitment was walked through - from defining a requirement, to attracting candidates, selecting candidates and making an offer. Each stage included silent brainstorming and then open discussion.

Where the discussion extended into the broader approach for diversity and inclusion, these were gathered as each process step was discussed and have been collated at the end of this document.

The outputs have been documented as they were discussed and grouped where appropriate, however the content has been changed very little in order to retain the true essence of the discussion.

Step 1 - Define the requirement

Taking time on the requirements was a key element of the discussion. In particular, avoiding a tick box exercise and definitely no copy and pasting of job specs. The description should relate to the specific role and by exactly what the employer is looking for. Lazy job specs results in generalist candidates rather than the specialists or unique qualities. Those who have "spiky" profile may not recognise themselves within these types of specs.

Narrow down what types of behaviours that would be ideal, as Mark explained, "You can teach skills, but behaviours are more difficult to shape and nurture."

To do this it was recognised that the hiring manager may need to be challenged in order to get all of the information. Certainly where items are missing from a job specification (e.g. flexible work), challenge should be made as to why.

Of course, a minimum requirement now is checking job specs for bias and removing any language such as this. We can go further however by using personal language – "You" not "Candidate". You wouldn't refer to clients or customers in the third person in any marketing material so why take this approach with potential talent. Given that we expect candidates to tailor their CV to the job spec, shouldn't we also be tailoring the spec to individuals?

Go out of your way to advertise the commitment to D&I, whether this be through sharing the flexible benefits, stories of employees or visibly showing the employees you have and how diverse they are. This is the same for the job spec as a whole. It's an advert to attract candidates and especially those who may not have noticed your brand before or thought about working with you.

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> Reasonable adjustments are for recruitment, not just employment

One item that came up consistently for each step, was to consider "reasonable adjustments" as something not just for once someone is hired, but from the

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beginning of the recruitment process. Starting with this context in mind, changes how each step should be approached.

Step 2 - Attract and find candidates

The first thing to consider is whether we are fishing in the right talent pools. If recruitment agents have been on the books for a while, how are they (are they?) extending their reach? We often talk of talent shortages, but don't stop to consider whether we're restricting ourselves by staying with one approach that may have served us well in the past, but not so much now.

Many of us assume that the need for diverse candidates is a given, but not everyone may start with this assumption. It's important to be clear to internal and external agencies that there's an expectation of diverse candidates and work with them to understand how they will be sourced. As a business, you may already have access to new networks and talent pools, certainly this should be on the radar of an agency.

It can be incredibly good practice to regularly get to know people who aren't like you and aren't like those you normally place. This will help not only extend your network, but also understand better the challenges faced by those with less privilege. Doing this can take some courage as you need to break down barriers and recognise that the uncomfortable feeling you have in unfamiliar surroundings is not unlike that felt by others every day.

A great way to attract candidates and validate your D&I commitment is to have role models from your organisation who can be visible to potential candidates. In short, if you see it, you can believe you can be it. Make specific reference to welcoming neuro diverse candidates and have role models. This is often missed in organisations

Social media is a great place to identify groups of people who you wouldn't ordinarily speak with about roles. Engage in conversation, see how people feel about your brand, see what questions they have and meet them where they are.

Show the people behind the job spec and company website by utilising video. Give people the option to watch or read the job description.

> **"**
> Consider the environment, is it really welcoming for all?

Consider the employee environment you have created. For example open plan offices are a challenge for many neuro-diverse employees – noise, light and movement can be distracting and sometimes even painful. If you have pictures of the environment on the website, or descriptions in the specification, how might this be perceived by someone who is challenged in this way?

Instead of asking if people if they have disabilities, ask broader questions about what they might need to help them do the job. Some people don't class themselves as disabled when they may actually have specific needs.

Filling in job applications can be difficult for people with learning differences. Think about how candidates can apply and be flexible with the application process

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Step 3 - Select Candidates

The first place to start is at the top of the funnel, making sure it's diverse at the top, before beginning to shortlist. Remember to remove names, age, gender and school to avoid bias at the initial "sifting" stage if there is one.

When shortlisting, consider why you are discounting some people, for example career gaps and educational background or results. Ask questions rather than making assumptions. Consider how you feel about typos on a CV and whether this can be used as a determining factor as to whether someone can do a specific role. Consider the life and professional experiences people bring to an organisation not just their "on paper" attributes

Interviews and assessments are often designed specifically to trip people up, or identify failings. This often identifies those who are good in an interview or assessment environment (and conversely results in those who find it a challenge being discounted), rather than good at the actual job required. Instead, consider how to get the best out of a candidate so it's an accurate representation of the person you would actually be hiring – draw out people's strengths rather than shine a spotlight on weaknesses. You could even plan the interview and share questions with people beforehand.

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> Are your interviews designed to trip people up or show how great they are?

In terms of the interview itself, the skill of interviewing is often underestimated. Make sure the interviewer is trained, that questions have been prepared beforehand and that there is a diverse panel wherever possible. Recognise that lazy interview questions like "tell me about yourself" can be difficult for people that need clarity.

Consider all of your approaches to assessment – are you really assessing the skills for the job? Use skills based assessments and feedback rather than solely based on subjective interviews. If verbal and communication skills are not required for the job, then don't judge these in the interview or assessment process. Recognise that people who often get the job are those who are good at talking about it rather than doing it. Ask for examples of how similar tasks have been done in the past

When using technology to support the process, recognise the limitations and risks of black box solutions like AI – e.g. how diverse is the team who programmed it? Have they used historical data that may have included bias?

Slow down the selection process. Introduce break points to avoid immediate unconscious bias. Reverting to lists of skills and experience and including others in the decision process can help with this. When you're shortlisting, consider why you like a candidate – is it because they are like you, or those already hired?

As mentioned before, ensure the reasonable adjustment conversation is happening in the recruitment process from the beginning. This is critical at the application stage. Consider having a process where candidates can apply for a role however they like, enabling them to best demonstrate their skills

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Step 4 - Offer Management

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How can we help you in your job?

When discussing an offer with a candidate ask "what can we do to help you in your job and make you more efficient". It can be incredibly difficult for a candidate at this stage to ask for additional help as they may have previously experienced bias and offers being withdrawn. Help people share what they need to do a great job.

You may think you know what certain people need because you've dealt with similar situations before. It's still better to ask for details rather than make assumptions. Conditions and challenges may on the surface appear to be similar, but help required may be very different.

Recognised that many people from underrepresented groups are inclined to accept a lower salary. Have the salary in mind before selecting a candidate and then challenge yourself as to why it should increase or decrease. Ultimately, do not take advantage of this circumstance.

Recognise that having training in both the interview and the offer management process can be incredibly effective, not only for the business, but also for both people involved in the offer. It helps to reach a conclusion quickly and for the conversation to be well facilitated.

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Additional Insights

Below is a list of additional insights that were documented as part of the process, but were outside of the main four steps covered;

Choosing an agency or solution

- Recruiters and recruitment solutions should evidence that they have a good awareness of D&I challenges and recruiters should have received recognised training. As Josh outlined, "There's often no diversity in recruitment agencies themselves, so relying on them to push the diversity agenda won't work."
- Recognise that the pricing structure and commission payments involved may be driving a behaviour away from the result you actually want. Put in place a reward model that fits with your desired outcome for the best talent. As Karen put it, "Commission is often the dirty secret that the end-hirer doesn't know about."
- The recruitment industry as it stands feels too much like a 'meat market' where candidates are a commodity – much of this is driven by the commission structure
- Check how diverse the agencies/companies are that are supporting your recruitment process. Consider what training agencies are offering their own staff when it comes to D&I

Internal strategy

- Prioritise best placement over placement
- Make sure you and your agencies are aware of the equalities act and the reasonable adjustments you should make
- Ensure that diversity doesn't focus on one select group (e.g. gender/race). It's not equitable if it's unbalanced
- Provide training to interviewers – it's often too easy to assume they can interview in a fair and equal level because of their experience or seniority
- Make sure you are aware of the benefits of hiring diverse talent and that those involved in the process truly understand this and reflect this in their actions
- Have KPI's linked to diversity and inclusion – should be as important as finances, employer branding and bums on seats metrics
- Make equity and equality part of the values of the organisation so it's in the fabric of the building and a given in every process and conversation – how we treat customers, suppliers and stakeholders. We worry about the equality act in some respects but not others - holistic diversity is needed
- Hold suppliers to account for an equitable process just like you would ethical behaviour. Have a code of conduct in line with what you are trying to achieve.
- Recognise that there will be culture change when there is a move to employ more diverse candidates. You can't recruit diverse people and expect them to share the same thoughts, beliefs etc. As Mark explained, "We bring amazing people in to the business, we pick them because of what makes them different, then we try to make them 'fit in', which goes against everything

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we've worked for in the hiring process." In fact, according to Karen, "The term 'fitting in' is the enemy of diversity."

- The hiring of new talent is such an important activity for a business. Consider how well it is prioritised and how much trust you have in the partners who are representing your company and brand.
- Recognise that the candidates need to trust your company to move towards it. The recruitment process can help or hinder this.
- Don't commit to hiring diverse people and then try to change them or make them feel as though the need to fit in/assimilate
- Educate that diverse talent is great talent
- Ensure those having conversations with candidates aware of reasonable adjustments that can and should be made
- Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone – the truth is, D&I cannot be addressed without having an uncomfortable conversation
- It's also important to consider the 'stereotype threat' where we see things shift the other way and those who have broken through the diversity barrier begin recruiting in their own image rather than in line with D&I needs

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Contact Details

For any queries or clarification please contact Juliet Eccleston, CEO and Founder of AnyGood?.

To receive a personalised audit of your organisation's recruitment process and to understand key strengths and weakness areas and ultimately whether it is "diverse by design", do get in touch.

Diversity and Inclusion consultancy is available via AnyGood? and provided by a range of diverse consultants depending on the specific need of the organisation.

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