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Uncovering Unconscious Bias Through Inclusivity Auditing

With Tom Lakin, Senior Innovation Manager, Resource Solutions

Today's top candidates are seeking employers that promote a culture of diversity and inclusion. In fact, according to research from Glassdoor, 67% of job seekers consider workplace diversity an important factor when considering employment opportunities. But often, end-to-end recruitment practices present obstacles of unconscious biases along the way, hindering both candidates and organizations alike. Here, Tom Lakin, senior innovation manager for Resource Solutions, shares how an inclusivity audit can produce actionable results to eliminate unconscious bias and deliver meaningful change to an organization's hiring approach.

Q How does unconscious bias become embedded in the recruitment process?

A In recruitment, every single touch point for the candidate, recruiter, and hiring manager can introduce or perpetuate bias. Since bias is unknown, we don't know what we don't know. All recruitment processes contain innocent ignorance—behaviors and processes that have a disproportionate impact on some candidates that organizations aren't aware of. Take, for example, inquiring about salary history.

While asking current salary has been prohibited in many states, it remains common practice in many others. Asking a candidate their current salary is the single biggest way to perpetuate the pay gap. In fact, research from 2020 shows that asking candidates their current salary had the biggest impact on black candidates. Now, recruiters don't necessarily think of that when they are asking current salary—they are using it as a way to consider reward. But it is actually perpetuating bias.

The interview process can also pose hindrances. Many organizations think the more interview stages the better, but according to research from Google, there's no benefit to having more than four interviews. From a diversity perspective, the more time involved in a process has a disproportionately negative impact on women in particular. Research suggests that females have five hours less of free time per week compared to males. So if a male and a female candidate are both

going for same role and there are seven stages of interviews, that process will have disproportionate impact on the female candidate. No one intentionally designed it to give men an advantage, but it does. It's all innocent ignorance in action.

Q In what ways can organizations identify it?

A Having innocent ignorance brought to an organization's attention is a powerful way to create meaningful change. Inclusivity auditing helps look for bias in the end-to-end recruitment process. The approach is analyzing the impact of a recruitment process from every single step by looking through eight individual lenses:

- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability and neurodiversity
- LGBTQ+
- Age
- Faith
- Socioeconomic background and
- Veterans.

This eight-lens audit provides actionable recommendations for meaningful change.

Take, for example, the pre-apply process. The majority of today's candidates start their journeys on Google, looking at reviews on different websites and content through search engines. All of that messaging needs auditing because it's outside of an organization's control. Then organizations need to look at the careers page content; conduct a facial representation audit; audit job postings

for the language used, the tone, and the sentiment; and understand the referral, application, and submission processes, among others.

Q How can organizations leverage information and feedback from the audit?

A The audit will first show the sheer number of touch points in the end-to-end recruitment process. For example, one organization had 279 touchpoints that needed to be audited for bias. Information from the audit is then linked to market-specific data. This is where organizations can reengineer their process to be more inclusive.

For example, from the facial recognition audit, organizations will gain a better understanding if their careers page actually reflects the communities that the organization represents. It can also provide recommendations based on hiring data.

If an employer is looking for candidates in a specific area, the content on its website should reflect the communities where they are hiring.

A stage-by-stage process reengineer from pre-apply and job posting to referrals, applications, interviews, and offers, will help eliminate biases. On average, an audit will analyze 157 data points, blend research and data from over 100 sources, and produce a minimum of 44 recommendations for meaningful change

Contact jason.bouchard@resourcesolutions.com to learn more about diverse hiring practices.