



SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Early Careers
Virtual Roundtable
Gender and
Candidate Attraction

No. 8

Wednesday 4th
November 2020
10am - 11:30am

Overview

For the many organisations looking to hire for diverse and inclusive futures, hiring diverse genders is a must in the battle for fair and equal inclusion. Despite the benefits it brings to both candidate and organisation, hiring for all genders still presents many barriers and challenges.

In this roundtable, the attendees sought to break down where these challenges start and how the world of business might go about beating them.

FOR FAIR, EQUAL AND SUCCESSFUL FUTURES NO MATTER WHO WE ARE

Attendees of the eighth roundtable included:



The conversation



Despite the many initiatives by organisations to drive underrepresented genders into great-fit careers, difficulties still exist. Having been on the recruitment 'agenda' for a number of years, many industries still struggle to attract fair and equal numbers of all genders, particularly in the case of recruiting more females into IT. The eighth roundtable session started early on identifying what the current issues are and where organisations can focus their efforts to begin turning the tide.

For one attendee the problem was said to start from wherever the shortfalls of the organisation are and when it comes to gender, that means identifying what genders, at what age and for what industries. Hiring objectives in organisations are also dictated by resource and so prioritisation is a necessity in the fight for fair and equal hiring.

For one attendee, the challenge starts earlier in the candidate pipeline when concerning attracting diverse genders. School engagement has become an optimum method for generating awareness of, and interest in underrepresented industries, especially where the perceptions and interests of these industries in older age groups are already skewed.

Attendees largely agreed with this approach, sharing their views that this school outreach method shares many similarities to that of other diversity objectives like ethnicity or disability. This has allowed many attendees to build on their already existing diversity programmes to include gender attraction too.

It was also agreed however that whilst this is a good start for an organisation's approach, when it comes to moving candidates through their journey to career application and assessment, the needs of each individual do begin to separate. Focussing on the metrics of candidate attraction has already identified the shortfalls for a catch all candidate approach. Focussing on one area naturally distracts from achieving in another.

Where it was agreed that the challenge to fight industry awareness and perception starts at school, one attendee had seen great success from holding 'insight sessions'. This is where students can attend places of work to experience a showcased view of employer environments and industries.

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Regardless of the time and approach, the attendees agreed that fair and equal representation is likely a challenge only solved by businesses. This is particularly the case when reflecting on the failures of T-Level introductions which had actually been found to hinder attraction of diverse genders.

How to drive more under-represented genders into the pipeline



Identifying where the problem starts helps to build a great foundation for reversing the problem. And this starts with attracting more under-represented genders into the candidate engagement funnel.

Candidates can't apply for what they can't see, but before that they won't apply for what they don't like or don't understand. This is where the effort needs to be made, in educating an audience. But the approach isn't that simple.

The conversation



One attendee started by saying that 90% of IT roles are not in the IT sector – we need to focus on roles as opposed to sector in order to boost attendance in sectors and fill them. This was agreed unanimously with one attendee explaining it as 'concentrating on the problem without concentrating on the problem'.

When it comes to focussing down on the individual candidate, knowing your audience is key to understanding how to approach them. Interestingly when it came to candidates applying for vacancies, females from BTEC groups overperformed GCSE and A-level groups in IT role application processes said one attendee.

Another attendee shared their difficulties in hiring not only under-represented genders but also ethnicities, explaining that candidates aren't interested in being hired if they are made to feel like a 'token hire'. Gender specific activities and events actually had an adverse effect in attracting more of the target genders.

For another attendee, holding competitions also had similar negative effects, putting off female participation and attracting more of a male audience.

Progress had been made for another organisation who had found that stereotypically females would apply much sooner in the timeline than other genders who would leave their application closer to the deadline. Knowing this had allowed the organisation to provide special support and keep the interest of these individuals 'warm' throughout the process.

Success had been seen in broadening the academic requirement of candidates and appearing softer in candidate requests said one attendee. Instead of listing specific STEM grades, asking for experience and knowledge of scientific subjects had created appetite in non-males.

Text decoders have also become an imperative tool, after identifying on more than one occasion and across multiple attendee experiences that masculine coded words have been known to put off females from applying. Much in the same way SEO is used to identify and utilise keywords from audience searches, it can be used for candidate audiences and vacancies.

Split testing allows organisations to experience changes in more than just subject line open and email clicks. Testing vacancy listings can reveal great information about your audience and what language compels them to engage. For example, advertising the same jobs via one ATS but with different job titles, can be utilised to appeal to more diverse audiences.

How to boost retention during assessment



As often discussed in the MAJIC model, the candidate journey doesn't stop at application. When it comes to the sensitive needs of under-represented candidates, special attention and support is required in order to maintain their engagement and capability during the assessment phase.

For many of these individuals, confidence is lacking and uncertainty in the future of the assessment can act as a real barrier to progress. The conversation started here.

The conversation



Measuring adverse impact is step one according to one attendee, who had identified that timed tests are the number one driver of candidate drop off. Measuring this deficit as the assessment moved forward helped them make the necessary changes to retain candidates.

For another attendee, candidate support and coaching have a key part in maintaining representation during the assessment stages. Explaining what each stage of assessment includes before the candidate reaches it and setting expectation ahead of time will be successful in making the candidate feel more relaxed and confident. One attendee had been able to reduce candidate drop-off to less than 1% by using an approach like this.

Another attendee shared that much like driving diversity in ethnicity diversity, the use of role models for the underrepresented genders has seen great success. Including an individual like the applying candidate to help guide them has been seen to build trust in and better relationships with the organisation. If one candidate knows that someone like them has already walked this path, then they will be more likely to engage and consider success for themselves.

Tapping into the candidates' values was also championed by attendees. On a very basic level, individuals need to be made to feel valued and considered. This has a direct effect on the confidence of candidates, not only boosting performance in assessment, but also making it easier for candidates to absorb themselves into the company culture once hired.

An attendee described the company culture conversation as finding a balance between 'enticement' and transparency in order to retain candidates through the entire journey. Sell the candidate on the position but be honest in what the position entails.

In conclusion

The road to equal gender hiring is a long one, but while challenges still exist, progress is still being made. From the conversation in this roundtable, it's clear that knowledge of the problem is growing along with the solutions to counter them.

Priorities must be made from a resource and underrepresentation perspective which presents challenges in hiring fairly and equally across the board. Fortunately, with approaches to achieving gender diversity, borrowing from those of the ethnicity and disability diverse hiring approaches, objectives can be combined and made easier.

A multitude of tools exist (text analytics, title changes, school outreach, non-gender-specific events etc.) to attract underrepresented genders, however finding out which ones are going to drive the best results is continuous process. Regardless, the right combination does exist.