

Harnessing Digital Tools for Recruitment in Research Administration

Striving for DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION

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As the tools we use to recruit move more and more online and advertising moves to large platforms, such as LinkedIn, it is vital that we, as research administrators, harness these large platforms in an effective way in order to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring. While hiring patterns can reflect bias, and moving online does not move away from those biases, intentional decisions can be made to support inclusion of diverse populations when hiring. LinkedIn, as an example, is a fantastic tool, one used by many institutions of higher education, but if not used correctly, it will replicate social networks and not generate a talent pool that is diverse in nature. External job boards, like LinkedIn, are more likely to be used by women when job searching. While networks are more likely to be used by men to job search. Yet, the use of a tool such as LinkedIn can boost diversity of candidates (Ideal, 2021).

Research administrators need to look at how we approach recruitment tools and how we use them to create the most diverse and broad talent pool possible. An expanded talent pool gives the university the best opportunity to find and hire the best conceivable candidate. If previous sourcing strategies used by the university have not produced diverse slates in the past, they are unlikely to do so in the future (Cathey, 2021). Thus, the use of online tools that help produce diverse candidate pools will provide a range of benefits including broader skills, increased linguistic and cultural awareness, and a more varied talent pool and is essential to increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workforce. After all, diverse teams support higher revenue, innovative leaders, leadership in market segmentation, and becoming a destination of choice for employment. (McConnell, 2020). Diversity recruitment is a practice of hiring candidates using a process that is free from bias, and it is merit based aiming to find the best candidates but structured to give all candidates an equal opportunity. Diversity is made up of two broad categories: (1) inherent diversity is made up of demographic factors (race, gender, age) and (2) acquired diversity refers to things that can evolve over time, such as education, experience, skills, and knowledge (McConnell, 2020).

Actively Sourcing Candidates

In addition to the use of recruitment tools, if you are actively searching for candidates there are some key ways to use search terms to ensure that you have a more diverse talent pool (Cathey, 2021; Huppert, 2018). As an example, one may need to search for specific institutions that have diverse student bodies, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), minority serving institutions (MSIs), and tribal colleges. You can connect key terms with those key universities and the term “or” to search for them. You can use the same strategy related to other key demographic factors using sorority and fraternity names, including African-American, Latino and Asian-American Greek and fraternal organizations, LGBTQ+ friendly campus organizations, and veteran’s groups (Recruitment Brief, 2021). You can also add search alerts to custom filters to support finding candidates with a unique skill set when they enter the labor pool. You can also ensure elevation of your posting with key hashtags and LinkedIn groups that support inclusive hiring (Andreano, 2012).

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Additionally, if using LinkedIn, you can use a new feature to hide names and photographs of potential candidates, reducing unconscious bias. There is significant bias against underrepresented minorities in terms of the number of initial invitations to interview and this feature attempts to reduce this bias (Srinivasan, 2021). Through correspondence experiments, where identical resumes were sent to the same job but with different names, we know that candidates in the United States perceived to be from non-

English speaking minority groups, immigrants, those from the Latinx and African-American communities, and those with Muslim names are less likely to be called for an interview than those with what is perceived to be a “White American” name (Quillian et al., 2017). Using tools that can resume screen will remove the name and picture to reduce this unconscious bias.

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It is also vital to reduce industry specific language to ensure that those with transferable skills consider your posting and widen your candidate pool, as well as to remove gendered and unconscious ableism terms that discourage the application of women and those with disabilities. (Recruitment Brief, 2021). There are a range of tools that can review a job description to support the removal of terms and reduce gendered language in particular, supporting a broader candidate pool to apply to a posting.

New Approaches

Increasing in popularity is the use of a “blind interview,” as a first-round interview screening tool. It is normally a text-based questionnaire, used as the first-round of interview, normally digitally accessed by the candidate. This tool asks questions, and this process removes bias around appearance and accent in the initial screening, also aiming to reduce unconscious bias against both women and minority candidates (McConnell, 2020).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been used to support resume screening, searching for key words and criteria to see if candidates meet the criteria (Ideal, 2021). It supports blind hiring as the criteria is being reviewed, and reduces unconscious bias around names, nation of origin, or religion (derived from name) are all removed. However, it can replicate bias in terms of the criteria actually being set. For instance, setting “years of experience” will allow the software to screen that for you, without bias; however, fewer women will apply for the role as they only apply where they meet the majority of the criteria, and if that criterion is not necessary then potentially viable candidates will be excluded by the AI system itself (Babcock, 2017). This is particularly true with years of experience. Is that a proxy for some specific types of experience, are you looking for a breadth of exposure throughout the field, and how long do you actually need to achieve it? The “years of experience” is a particularly poor criteria in that it potentially includes candidates who have years but not the appropriate breadth of experience, and it excludes potential candidates who have the breadth needed but not the years that you assumed would constitute the amount of time to accrue the experience.

Conclusion

As we continue to harness technology to support recruitment in Research Administration, it becomes more critical that we intentionally focus on inclusion as part of our strategy. We must aim to remove unconscious bias, question the criteria set for a role to query the barriers to entry that we create, and aim to promote positions with unbiased language to the widest range of candidates. Adding technology will not support those goals, and could rapidly increase bias, if we do not include its use with an intention to support diverse hiring. ■

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