

HOW TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY IN RECRUITMENT?



Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health

Recruitment practices that promote diversity

A diverse work community can have many advantages. According to research, it has a positive impact on, for example:

- an organization's innovativeness and creativity
- customer satisfaction
- reaching new customer groups
- profitability
- attractiveness of the workplace
- employee satisfaction
- on organization's public image

However, diverse personnel alone do not yield any benefits. Diversity must be managed in such a way as to harness its benefits. The promotion of diversity in an organization begins with recruitment practices that take equality and non-discrimination into account.

Employee diversity

Employee diversity refers to how employees differ in terms of, for example, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family situation, disability, language, religion, beliefs, and educational background.

1 Examine diversity in your organization

When your goal is to increase your organization's diversity, it is worth starting by looking at how diverse it already is.

- How diverse is your organization at the moment?
- Is there an area of diversity that needs improvement? Would you benefit, for example, from a wider age distribution or from having more people of different genders in technical positions? How are your employees' language and cultural skills? Is disability, partial work ability or a family situation an obstacle to employment in your organization?

Organisationens likabehandlings- och jämställdhetsplan är ett An organization's equality and equity plan is a useful tool for assessing the state of diversity and equality and for drawing up measures for ensuring diversity.

Equal treatment of all people is not always enough to achieve real equality. Achieving real equality may require taking into account the specific needs of a group that is particularly vulnerable to discrimination. This may involve positive action, the use of which should be defined in the equity and equality plan. Positive action in recruitment always requires systematic planning. It is not the same as favouritism, which means granting privileges to some in a way that discriminates against others.

If your organization is very homogeneous, stop and consider why this is the case and how your recruitment practices may influence this. Do you recruit people who are as compatible as possible with your culture, or do you look for candidates who can offer something new? The purpose of assessing the diversity of an organization is to identify areas that require improvement and areas for which skilled employees may be found from among a wider group of applicants.

2

Describe the job and define your evaluation criteria in a clear, non-discriminatory manner

The clarity and comprehensibility of the job description plays a key role in ensuring equality in recruitment.

When writing the job description, bear in mind the following:

- Are the task and the required skills and competences defined as clearly as possible?
- Can someone from outside the organization easily understand the job description?

Workplaces and different sectors often use language that is specific to them. Job descriptions should avoid workplace or sector-specific jargon. This ensures applicants from different backgrounds an equal chance of understanding the content of the job and its requirements.

- The selection criteria used in recruitment must be defined in advance and as clearly as possible.

The criteria should be based on the skills, qualifications and experience required for the job. Assessing applicants on the basis of predetermined criteria increases the objectivity of recruitment and reduces the impact on decision-making of irrelevant factors such as attitudes and preconceptions. Clear evaluation criteria also facilitate the work of recruiters.

It is advisable to define the language skills and level of language required by the job in advance. If the job requires knowledge of Finnish/Swedish or, for example, English, you should ask yourself:

- What is an adequate level to be able to successfully do the job?
- How important really are good Finnish language skills, for example, for the job?

It is also good to decide on how language skills are assessed. For example, is the applicant required to have completed and passed a specific language level test or will you assess language proficiency in some other way?

When the main language used in the work community is different to the employee's mother tongue, language becomes both a work tool and something to be learned. Language is also part of professional skills. In language-conscious workplaces, the diverse meanings of language are recognized and smooth interaction is supported. At the same time, it should be ensured that language skills are not an obstacle to optimizing the use of the employee's competence. Depending on the workplace and the job, this may mean, for example:

- Support in learning the languages used in the work community.
- Encouragement of the use of another common language.
- Encouragement of the use of different languages in parallel.

The above issues and their implementation should also be considered when defining the language skills required for the job.

3

Decide on questions related to language skills in advance

A job advertisement can express in many ways – in words and pictures – what kind of applicants the organization is targeting for the job. When writing the advertisement, consider:

- What language should the advertisement be written in? In addition to Finnish/Swedish, if the advertisement is also in English it may better reach those who do not speak Finnish/Swedish so well. An English advertisement also indicates that non-Finnish or non-Swedish native-speakers are also welcome applicants.
- What kind of language is used in the advertisement? For example, does your choice of words encourage only a particular gender to apply for the job?
- If the advertisement has illustrations, do they communicate diversity or homogeneity, or maintain gender stereotypes, for example?
- Consider including a diversity statement. This demonstrates that the organization appreciates diversity and encourages representatives of different minorities or under-represented groups to apply for the job.

4
**Prepare
the job
advertisement
carefully**

Diversity statement

A diversity statement in the job advertisement enables an organization to express its appreciation of employee diversity and encourage people from different under-represented groups to apply for the open position. This increases the faith of those in under-represented groups that they may possibly be selected for the job, and in this way improves their motivation to apply for it. In addition, highlighting appreciation of diversity makes an organization attractive to those who value diversity. The diversity statement can specifically name under-represented groups from which applicants are welcome.

Example of a diversity statement:

[Name of organization] values equality and diversity in the work community. We welcome applicants from different backgrounds, such as people of different ages, different genders and members of different language, cultural or minority groups.

5

Use varied recruitment channels and networks

Which recruitment channels do you use? How do you ensure that a job advertisement reaches applicants with different backgrounds?

Social media channels (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook) as well as the social media networks, groups, and email lists of various organizations, communities and educational institutions are possible routes for increasing the visibility of job advertisements. These are worth using in addition to the usual channels.

Networks are widely utilized in recruitment. If an organization's employees are not very diverse, it is likely that their networks will also be homogeneous. In such situations, recruitment through networks most often maintains the homogeneity of the personnel. How diverse are your own recruitment networks?

It is advisable to expand networks to include contacts with groups that are under-represented in the organization. For example, contacts with educational institutions, organizations and associations increase the chances of reaching representatives of under-represented groups. And remember the networks of your own employees! If you use recruitment services, make sure that the service providers are aware and understand that you value diversity among your employees.

To ensure equality in recruitment you must also examine the recruitment systems used in your organization.

- How easy and comprehensible are the application process' phases for applicants from different backgrounds? For example, are the language and instructions of the different forms you use as clear and comprehensible as possible?
- Have the accessibility aspects of the systems been taken into account?

6

Ensure that the recruitment systems you use are accessible

Positive action

The objective of positive action is to promote real equality (see Non-discrimination Act 1325/2014, section 9: Positive action). People in weaker or disadvantaged positions may receive positive action.

In recruitment, positive action must be systematically planned and its use should be decided on before recruitment. Its use without planning can be interpreted as arbitrary.

It is good practice to mention the possibility of positive action in the job advertisement. Its use may be called for when a fair comparison has been made between applicants and the selection is between more or less equal candidates. Positive action should be temporary and end once the situation has been resolved.

7 Consider using blind or partial blind recruitment

The purpose of blind recruitment is to prevent discrimination in recruitment and to make recruiters pay attention, above all, to the applicant's competence and ability.

In blind recruitment, all information on the applicant and their background that is not related to the competence or qualifications required for the job (such as name, gender, address, age, nationality, educational institution, year of graduation and photograph of the applicant) are removed from the application. Anonymization prevents stereotypes and biases or preconceptions, for example, from affecting who is invited for a job interview. Applicants should be instructed not to mention anything about themselves that they do not want to reveal in order to protect their anonymity.

If your recruitment system does not enable anonymization, this must be done by people other than those who select applicants for interviews.

A job interview can also be conducted anonymously by, for example, sending questions to applicants which they answer in writing. When the interview also takes place anonymously, this is **full blind recruitment**. However, interaction during a job interview is considered a significant factor in the recruitment decision, and therefore a face-to-face interview is often preferred. If the interview takes place face-to-face, but the recruitment process has otherwise been anonymous, this is **partial blind recruitment**.

Equality in recruitment can also be promoted by giving applicants the opportunity to show their skills in other ways than a written application. An anonymous skill or competence sample can be used when this suits the nature of the job being applied for. In most cases, a task performed before an interview invitation is also scored and evaluated anonymously.

8

Prepare carefully for the interview

An interview is challenging in terms of ensuring equality. Recruiters, like everyone else, have subconscious biases and stereotypes that can distort their ability to neutrally evaluate – research shows that biases affect recruiters' evaluations considerably more than they themselves believe. Awareness of discrimination in working life and awareness of one's own biases reduce distorted assessments. Recruiters should thus undergo training on how to challenge their stereotypes and discrimination in recruitment situations.

It is also worth thinking in advance about the language used in the interview from the perspective of equality. For example, could the interview be conducted in different languages, using Finnish/Swedish and English in parallel? This may make it easier for someone whose native language is something other than Finnish or Swedish to express themselves and emphasize their skills in the interview.

In addition, careful preparation promotes equality in both the interview and decision-making:

- Prepare interview questions carefully in advance so that they help identify the skills and competences required by the job as well as possible and are comparable to the pre-determined assessment criteria.
- You can only ask the applicant for information necessary for their selection and you can only assess them on the basis of information that may be relevant to performing their work tasks. Even the consent of the applicant does not entitle the employer to collect personal data from them that is not necessary for the selection process.
- Make sure that the interview questions are clear and comprehensible to people from different backgrounds. Avoid workplace or sector-specific jargon.
- Make good, comprehensive notes in the interview as a basis for later making evaluations and choices.

- It is good to have more than one interviewer and, if possible, interviewers should have different backgrounds and characteristics. This dilutes any distorted assessments based on possible biases of a single interviewer in recruitment decisions.
- During an interview, you should focus solely on interviewing. The time for evaluating is after the interview. Trying to interview and evaluate at the same time is too hard. It makes it more likely that stereotypes and biases will influence assessments.

When you make a recruitment decision, challenge your ways of thinking and biases – what are the factors that influence your decision and which ones are relevant to the job in question? Are you recruiting someone who will easily blend in with your culture or someone that can add something new?

For recruitment decisions to be transparent, it is important that:

- your selection is clearly justified on the basis of pre-determined criteria
- you can justify the impact that your selection will have on the diversity of personnel if the selection is based on positive action.

The objectivity of the selection is increased if two (or more) evaluators examine whether the applicants fulfil the selection criteria. It is good practice to inform all applicants of the recruitment decision and the reasons for the selection. Good communication with applicants also signals that the organization respects its applicants. A transparent recruitment process also increases the feeling of fairness. It is worth remembering that the employer's communication with the applicants also affects their image and competitiveness.

9

Ensure non-discrimination and transparency in selection

10

Make clear recruitment practice guidelines that promote equality

Make clear guidelines that promote equality for recruitment practices, for non-discrimination in recruitment, and for other policies that may promote diversity in the organization, such as the option of positive action. It is important that all supervisors who recruit are also aware of these guidelines.

It is a good idea to arrange training for recruiters on good recruitment practices, interviewing and recognizing subconscious biases and preconceptions and their significance when making assessments.

The benefits of diversity among employees can be achieved when management and the organizational culture support well-functioning diversity and inclusion.

The benefits of diversity, such as innovation and creativity, stem from differences and having a range of different perspectives. Of course, this also involves the risk of conflict, so in a diverse work community, it is worth investing in developing mutual trust. Creating an atmosphere that values diversity and a culture in which attitudes towards different views are constructive and approached with interest is essential. In an inclusive organization, everyone feels valued as themselves. Inclusion also means that everyone has equal opportunities to advance in their careers and to receive support to do so.

Discrimination in recruitment

Finnish law prohibits discrimination in employment, including discrimination against applicants. The prohibition of discrimination applies to the entire recruitment process during recruitment: in the preparation of the job advertisement, the invitation to an interview, the selection of the employee and decisions on salary. A person who has suffered discrimination in recruitment has the right to claim compensation for discrimination from the employer via the district court. Discrimination is not always a case of an employer's intention or negligence.

Chapter 3, section 8 of the Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics. Discrimination is when an applicant is placed in a different position with regard to the above factors. Positive action aiming to achieve real equality (§9) however, is permissible. The Equality Act (Act on Equality between Women and Men, 1986/609) prohibits discrimination in recruitment based on gender, gender identity or gender expression. According to the Act, discrimination also means that a person is placed in a less favourable position in recruitment on the basis of other gender-related reasons, such as pregnancy.

If selection in recruitment is based on, for example, gender, the reason must be justifiably related to the job. An acceptable reason may be, for example, choosing a man with less merits than someone of another gender for a male role in a film. Perfect Finnish language proficiency cannot be used as a selection criterion if the job does not require perfect Finnish language skills. In order to ensure non-discriminatory recruitment, it is essential to precisely define the selection criteria in advance, based on the requirements of the job. If the employer does not comply with the pre-determined selection criteria in their selection, the reason for this must be justifiable.

In addition to the Non-Discrimination and Equality Acts, the Constitution, Criminal Law, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Employment Contracts Act, the Act on the Protection of Privacy in Working Life, the Personal Data Act and the EU directives all apply to recruitment-related issues.



More information

Non-discrimination Act 1325/2014 (finlex.fi)

Act on Equality between Women and Men 609/1986 (finlex.fi)

Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (syrjinta.fi)

Ombudsman for Equality (tasa-arvo.fi)

Gender equality - Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality)

Non-discrimination - Occupational Safety and Health Administration in Finland (www.tyosuojelu.fi/web/en/employment-relationship/non-discrimination)

Manifold more – Leverage to the professional careers of immigrant background women -project (2019–2022)

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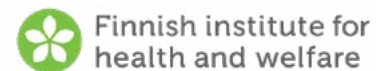
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