GLG

BRIGHTPAPER

Bringing Bias to the Forefront

Strategies to Mitigate Unconscious Racial Bias in U.S. Hiring

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Insights with Impact

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I. INTRODUCTION

Few business practices have a greater impact on human welfare than hiring, which can be a gateway to financial security and mobility for many people and their families. Wages comprise more than 70% of household income. Yet people of color earn approximately 75 cents for every dollar earned by their White counterparts. For our society, economic justice — and racial justice in turn — hinges on equitable hiring outcomes.

Equitable hiring is not only a humanitarian issue. For most companies, hiring is mission-critical, justifying an estimated $200B per year of global business expenditure on recruiting alone. The right talent in the right roles can unleash an organization's potential, while a mis-hire for a critical position can be disastrous. As such, companies have a powerful incentive to cast a wide net in their search for top performers and to avoid discriminating against high-potential candidates due to race or other factors that are irrelevant to job performance.

Nevertheless, bias in hiring remains a significant problem in the United States. While it may seem like progress has been made on this front, a metadata analysis shows considerable racial bias remains, as measured by callbacks given to White versus Black applicants. From 1990 to 2015, White applicants received, on average, 36% more callbacks than Black applicants with identical résumés. What is particularly disheartening is the trend line — the ratio of callbacks for Black versus White candidates over that time is essentially flat.

This divide persists despite earnest efforts by organizations to combat discrimination and increase inclusivity. Such organizations tend to miss something fundamental about how bias manifests throughout the hiring process in both overt and hidden ways.

> The fact is that bias prevents the best candidate from being hired. Period. Unless companies fix this problem, they are literally settling for less without knowing it.
>
> — Ivan Lee

Part of the challenge is rooted in unconscious, or implicit, bias: the "automatic, unintentional attitudes and beliefs that can positively or negatively impact our judgments and/or behavior toward another person or group" (Benjamin Reese). These subjective perceptions find their foundation in an individual's early key influences, such as personal history, family/community upbringing, and cultural messaging. In the context of hiring, unconscious bias can create "organizational blind spots that prevent the company from creating equitable opportunities for candidates to move through the hiring process" (Deloria Nelson-Streete).

To help organizations identify possible solutions to this problem, GLG convened a panel of talent and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) experts to unpack the problem of unconscious racial bias in hiring.[1] The second report in our award-winning "Insights with Impact" series, which brings the power of expert insight to urgent social challenges, this paper examines hiring bias and offers concrete tactics and strategies for organizations to reduce bias throughout their hiring processes. At the core of this paper is an inventory of the key factors ("Criteria") that ultimately drive hiring decisions, divided into those we overtly express ("Explicit Criteria") and those that operate unconsciously ("Implicit Criteria"). The panelists' insights, and the recommendations that follow, emerge from a holistic view of the factors involved: psychology, organization, process, and leadership.

METHODOLOGY

From June 27-30, 2022, GLG hosted a four-day asynchronous virtual, written panel discussion, bringing together nine experts in talent acquisition and DEI. Panelists shared their perspectives and responded to those shared by other participants, engaging directly with one another to enhance dialogue and strengthen understanding. This report was then written based on the insights shared by the panelists in their extended discussion.

The panelists were:

- **Diane Ashley**, JD, Founder and CEO at DTA Diversity Counts, former Chief Diversity Officer at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York
- **Katherine Kelley**, Global Director of Learner Engagement at Generation
- **Ivan Lee**, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Elastic, former DEI Practitioner at T-Mobile and at Apple
- **Paul Lesser**, Principal at PHL Talent Advisory Services, former Head of Talent Acquisition, Talent Development, and Learning at Fidelity Investments
- **Deloria Nelson-Streete**, President at Authentic Culture and Engagement Solutions, former Managing Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Charles Schwab
- **Benjamin D. Reese, Jr.**, PsyD, President and CEO at BenReese, former VP for Institutional Equity and Chief Diversity Officer at Duke University and the Duke University Health System
- **Nick Shekerdemian**, Cofounder and Executive Chairman at Headstart AI
- **Carole Weinstein**, Independent DEI and HR Consultant, Founder and Chief Learning Officer at Learning Works
- Education and Employment Consultant, former Senior Official at the U.S. Department of Education

[1] While the scope of the panel discussion was primarily focused on race, panelists underscored the importance of considering intersectionality in any bias-reduction effort. "It's critical to understand the specific ways biases 'intersect' with one another to ensure that any solutions put forward meaningfully produce equitable outcomes across a diverse set of stakeholders. A strategy to mitigate racial bias may miss an opportunity to address biases that negatively impact a Black, 40+ job seeker, for example" (Katherine Kelley).

II. TABLE STAKES: LEADERSHIP-CHAMPIONED INITIATIVES SUPPORTED BY METRICS

Similar to the expert feedback in the first "Insights with Impact" report, "Illuminating Invisible Inequities in Healthcare," panelists stressed the importance of strong C-level commitment to overcoming bias. To deliver lasting impact, companies need a steadfast "tone from the top" and an airtight system of measurement.

A. Tone from the Top

> If DEI as a strategic goal rests solely on the DEI or HR departments, progress will quickly reach a glass or concrete ceiling.
>
> — Diane Ashley

Many organizations only pay lip service to diversity hiring, pursuing initiatives designed more for public relations than for delivering fundamental, lasting change. For change to be substantive, leaders must sincerely commit themselves, and the broader organization, to doing the hard work. Team members at all levels look to management to determine whether the organization's intentions are credible, focusing more on what management teams *do* over what they say.

Leaders play four unique roles in driving successful diversity hiring initiatives:

> Executive directives are a catalyst for change. They guarantee resources for the work and create self-interest in accomplishing the targets.
>
> — Ivan Lee

Role Modeling: Leaders must embrace the power of the example they set, and visibly demonstrate that they are holding themselves to the same standards they expect from others. If C-level leaders share superficial talking points on diversity hiring but do not attend trainings themselves, ensure diverse slates for senior positions, or get involved in employee resource groups, the mandate is likely to ring hollow.

> Deep, personal understanding of the role of bias in your life and within your organization is critical. As you look to enhance DEI in your organization, constantly ask yourself, 'Is the change I'm about to make a short-term initiative, or does it impact more systemic or structural issues of inequality?'
>
> — Benjamin Reese

Talent Building: Diversity in leadership tends to accurately predict the effectiveness of diversity hiring initiatives throughout an organization. Even well-intentioned organizations will struggle to attract diverse talent if candidates see no one who represents them in leadership positions. Therefore, a CEO who prioritizes diversity on their own senior staff is not only walking the walk, but also building a leadership bench that will add value to every DEI hiring initiative taken on an organizational level.

> Diversity in leadership plays a critical role in demonstrating and modeling excellence — and those leaders must have the resources and power to influence strategy and accountabilities.
>
> — Benjamin Reese

Resource Allocation: Diversity hiring initiatives do not need to be excessively costly, but they do require resources — financial as well as human. Leaders play the central role in allocation decisions, including managing tough trade-offs with other business priorities. Without dedicated commitments of such resources, initiatives will fail to build momentum, or even get off the ground.

> Hiring practices shouldn't just incorporate DEI but instead should be predicated on DEI.
>
> — Nick Shekerdemian

Goal Setting: Organizations notoriously struggle with vague mandates for "improvement." Undertaking a sincere, executive-backed initiative requires leaders to delineate a clear objective and ensure that the objective is measurable — ideally with quantifiable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) underpinning it. The highest-level goals should be relatively simple to both communicate and measure.

The intent should be to build a diverse workforce, not just to hire candidates of diverse backgrounds. Leaders must take an honest look at the true "point of departure" (the current state of diversity in the workforce, backed by data and facts) before establishing the "destination" (the desired state).[2] Closing the gap between the current state and the desired state depends not only on executing effective hiring initiatives but also on retaining employees of diverse backgrounds. While employee development and retention strategies fall outside the scope of this report, our panelists agreed that this is a critical consideration in setting hiring-specific goals.[3]

B. Metrics

Coherent systems of data collection, measurement, and auditing are instrumental to achieving leadership-backed targets. Modern data-collection capabilities allow organizations to self-diagnose the health of their talent life cycle with exceptional granularity and understand where unconscious bias is likely affecting their hiring and retention processes. Equipped with this data, organizations can correct course.

Currently, the collection of demographic data, while a vital part of any diversity strategy, is largely dependent on candidate self-reporting. Candidates may be dissuaded from providing demographic information because the listed categories do not reflect their identities, they don't know how the information will be used, or they perceive a lack of organizational authenticity, among other reasons.

Panelists suggested that companies:

1. Draw upon employee resource groups, DEI professionals, and the current workforce to suggest a broad range of nonbinary identity characteristics
2. Be transparent about how the information is collected and used, as well as the specific actions the company will take in response to the data
3. Keep data anonymous and aggregated
4. Present candidates with the organization's specific commitments to diverse hiring practices and a diverse culture

> Diversity tracking often misses social background, but this is amongst the most critical areas to track, as social mobility is one of the most important forms of diversity improvement.
>
> — Nick Shekerdemian

[2] Panelists encouraged leaders to engage others in the organization in the process of assessing the point of departure, both to enrich understanding and to bolster organizational buy-in.
[3] Panelists were vocal about the critical importance of retaining, developing, and promoting diverse talent. As one panelist advises, "CEOs and executives can't hire their way out of this…they need to invest in their current diverse associates to ensure they retain them through development experiences, projects, and promotions." (Paul Lesser).

After establishing an effective means of capturing candidate demographics, organizations should turn their attention to other key hiring metrics. The kinds of information that can be helpful in diagnosing and remedying unconscious bias within an organization include the following:

- **Contextual information**. Capture ample background information on each hire (role, team, location, hiring team members, etc.) to measure progress at a sufficiently granular level and to support systems of internal accountability.
- **Candidate source**. Segment candidates by source (inbound/job post, recruiter sourced, career fair, referral) to isolate issues and identify opportunities that are specific to a given source.
- **Aggregate candidate counts at each process stage**. View "snapshots" of the total number of candidates, by demographics, at each stage of the funnel (sourced, screened, onsite, offered, accepted) to provide visibility into the diversity of the candidate pool.
- **Pass-through rates**. View "flows" or percentages of candidates moving from one stage to the next over time, to identify differences between demographic groups.
- **Qualitative categorizations**. Cluster qualitative information where possible. For example, create categories for why candidates were passed upon at each stage, why candidates dropped out of the process, or why they declined offers.

Once the data structures are established, the next imperative is to ensure that business processes and IT systems are in place to capture the relevant data on an ongoing basis. Data collection cannot be a one-off or even periodic effort — it must be "always on." To that end, leaders at all levels should ensure that the individuals who manage hiring touch points track that information systematically.

Finally, data is valuable only if it is used. Organizations should institute regular reporting practices and ensure that those reports drive decision making. With this data, organizations can reliably track progress at scale against the hiring goal, and therefore the broader workforce diversity goal. "When in doubt, always go back to the data" (Shekerdemian).

III. DRIVING IMPACT: REMOVING BIAS EMBEDDED IN HIRING CRITERIA

Any hiring decision, whether biased or not, involves hiring teams establishing a set of criteria that they believe matter for success in each role, and then evaluating candidates against those criteria. These criteria can be shared across the hiring group or held privately by one or more team members. They can be formal (e.g., written job descriptions), informal (e.g., discussed in a hiring team meeting), or even subconscious.

We will refer to the formal, shared category of criteria as "explicit criteria" and the more individual, informal, or subconscious category as "implicit criteria." Both categories contribute meaningfully to hiring bias, but the mechanics — and mitigation plan — differ for each.

A. Explicit Criteria: Bias Masquerading as "Proxies"

The first step in any hiring process is for hiring managers, and those supporting them, to formally establish the criteria to measure candidates against. These criteria are overtly communicated in the form of external job descriptions and/or internal hiring

> We should move as a society as much as possible toward maximizing opportunity and allowing individuals to succeed based on merit, rather than superficial factors that might only entrench the makeup of an organization and its biases.
>
> **— Former U.S. Department of Education Official**

scorecards. These documents typically include sets of *skills* and *competencies* that the hiring manager and other team members deem essential for success in the role.

Most companies also include other factors, such as educational requirements, years of experience, titles, or credit checks. This is often the first place where bias emerges in a hiring process — before the organization has even met a candidate. Unlike skills and competencies, which connect to job performance directly, these other factors are *proxies* for performance success. For example, a college degree is a proxy for what we believe someone knows or can do by virtue of possessing that degree. The degree itself does not necessarily directly equate with performing the job.[4]

Given their indirect nature, it is not surprising that proxies are particularly susceptible to being influenced by unconscious bias. Proxies conceal biases because they can appear neutral or highly relevant to the job. But their presence on (or absence from) a given candidate's profile is almost always the result of a prior, potentially biased system.

> Racial bias is a systemic reality that is inherent in the fabric, history, politics, and economics of our country.
>
> — Carole Weinstein

For example, by using a specific title or degree as a proxy, a hiring manager "imports" all the systemic bias involved in accessing or obtaining that title or degree. A university education is largely dependent on access to early education, family modeling, and other resources that "historically marginalized groups often cannot access to the same degree as their White and/or affluent peers" (Katherine Kelley). Or, as another panelist put it, "those from social backgrounds who can't afford university, or who weren't supported in high school, are unable to even enter the high-touch parts of the recruiting process" (Shekerdemian). The use of proxies can therefore open the floodgates to unintended bias, with disproportionate consequences for communities of color.

Accordingly, removing proxies as explicit job requirements is an essential step toward mitigating racial bias in the hiring process.

B. Solution: Hire for Skills and Competencies Only

> Skill- and competency-based hiring approaches put knowledge, skills, and abilities first, rather than resume narratives, or inconsistent or less-relevant interviewer or screener questions.
>
> — Former U.S. Department of Education Official

Eliminating proxies removes the first key gateway by which unconscious bias creeps in. For most organizations, hiring for skills and competencies is unlikely to be novel, but the exclusive dependence on it may be. Doing away with all but skill and competency criteria in role definitions leaves only those things that are directly related to job performance.

Next, hiring teams need to ensure that the remaining explicit criteria (skills and competencies) are also unbiased. Because all subsequent steps in the hiring pipeline and talent life cycle depend on sound role

[4] Panelists challenged the relevance of degree requirements and nearly uniformly recommended eliminating them. An expert in learning indicated that requiring a degree does "little for assessing whether or not a potential hire will succeed or stay in a job" (Carole Weinstein). Other panelists pointed to research that "degrees are not a predictor of performance in non-vocational contexts" (Shekerdemian). Others emphasized the benefits of opening top-of-funnel diversity, given that degree requirements disproportionately disadvantage candidates of diverse backgrounds.

scoping, hiring teams should take special care to develop both bias-free *internal* role definitions and *external-facing* job descriptions that appropriately mirror them.[5] Critical to this is the use of inclusive, concrete, and neutral language to describe the skills and competencies needed for the role. For example, organizations should be careful when crafting competencies related to verbal communication style to avoid language or imagery that may predominantly call to mind White individuals (e.g., "Native English Speaker").

While there is no catch-all for defining the skills and competencies related to a specific role, panelists offered the following guiding principles:

Company-Wide Initiatives

Review and Revise Templates: Review job description templates and application tracking software configuration defaults to remove any explicit proxies.

- ***Tip**: Have multiple leaders review the language to help facilitate a thorough and diverse review*

Update Competency Lists: Inventory existing standardized job competency lists for potentially biased content, revise them, and redistribute updated versions.

- ***Tip**: Focus on naming only the minimum competencies needed both company-wide and for each role/team*

Offer Operational Support: Provide hiring teams with operational support, such as just-in-time training, templates, software tools, recall sheets/checklists.

- *"For example, a company can require hiring managers to take a 20-minute training immediately before they spend 40 minutes creating the job description." (Lee)*

Redefine the Role: Cross-reference updated competency lists with role descriptions, and integrate changes into employee performance management processes.

For Specific Role Definition

Define Needed Skills and Competencies: Focus only on the most critical skills and competencies required for success in the job and consider how the applicant might show those qualities through a range of life and work experiences.

- ***Tip**: Use language that is literal and factual rather than figurative or subjective*

Eliminate Proxies: Identify and eliminate any proxies for skills and competencies.

- *"Job descriptions might unconsciously privilege certain prior work environments, rather than skills that might be obtained in a variety of places." (Reese)*

Gather Diverse Feedback: Seek insight from a diverse group of stakeholders by asking the full team for feedback on the job description.

- *"Job descriptions are often not developed with the input and perceptions of diverse candidates." (Weinstein)*

Audit the Results: Thoroughly and regularly review the final job description, using software and tools where appropriate, to ensure it aligns with the latest language conventions.

[5] Similar processes can be deployed in performance management. Aligning on accurate skills and competencies needed for a given role is beneficial for existing employees and teams as well. Clear roles and responsibilities result in more measurable results, more creative and diverse outputs, and more transparent benchmarks for success and promotion.

C. Implicit Criteria: Bias Lingering in the Interviewer's Psyche

Implicit criteria are not expressly stated or agreed upon when formally defining or evaluating a candidate for a role, but they still influence individual perceptions of their capabilities. Like proxies, there may be nothing overtly race-related about implicit criteria, so we may fail to identify potential issues. Yet, when hiring teams make choices that favor some over others and there is no reasonable way to earn the role outside of these unstated personal or organizational preferences, they effectively become requirements of the job — requirements with hidden biases.

> Candidate evaluation, the most interpersonally high-touch stage of the hiring process, is by far the hardest point in the process to remove unconscious bias.
>
> — Nick Shekerdemian

There are several forms of implicit criteria worth unpacking: candidate affinity, cultural fit, the "ideal candidate" or "internal bar," and implicit proxies.

1. Candidate Affinity

Affinity causes us to gravitate toward those who appear to be like us, including those with similar interests, backgrounds, and appearances. "People naturally gravitate to those who they like, and who remind them of themselves or their friends and family" (Shekerdemian). However, when personal affiliations factor into hiring decisions, additional implicit, biased criteria have been added to the job description.

Affinity bias may show up early in the screening process if recruiters or hiring managers prioritize or favor their own commonalities with a candidate, such as universities, previous employers, personal connections/referral sources, or types of work environments/cultures, to the exclusion of others. If the candidate makes it to the interview, "affinity bias will often show up in not just the asking and answering of questions" but also the "flow, cadence, and comfort with the candidate" (Nelson-Streete). This can result in tendencies to go off-script or focus time in interviews on topics unrelated to the needs of the job. For example, "a hiring manager can develop various views of the candidate and act upon their biases by adjusting their questions. Sometimes they do this to confirm or justify their bias" (Lee).

As they approach decisions, hiring managers may even weigh affinity-related factors more strongly than other data they have gathered. In decision-making meetings, hiring team members with an affinity bias might express that they "just have a feeling" about a candidate.

Whether or not a particular team member shares things in common with a candidate falls outside the mandate of the role. Maintaining such affinity biases can create a compounding effect, as new hires who share the affinity may further reinforce the bias. "This can be particularly damaging in organizations that don't already have a foundation of diversity" (Shekerdemian). And when individual affinity biases scale across the organization, they can become improperly institutionalized as "cultural fit."

2. Cultural Fit

Cultural fit is a poorly defined concept, yet it is frequently referenced by hiring teams when discussing hiring criteria. Cultural fit is "often a code word that signals for more-of-the-same" (Nelson-Streete). It can "push to keep the status quo of who is being hired" (Ashley), which can be "an unconscious replication of a predominately White group of employees" (Reese).

The notion of "culture" can justify hiring decisions that obscure individual, company, or societal biases. Elements of a company's conventionally defined culture that involve little potential for racial bias can, and should, be formally encoded in explicit criteria, such as organizational norms regarding how teams are structured or work is executed. However, cultural fit becomes problematic when it is grounded in norms or expectations that are inherently biased or imply a preference toward one or more demographic groups — for example, those that concern socializing outside of work or otherwise favor certain personality types or mannerisms.

Cultural fit can lead to overt discrimination in candidate screening, especially in a large pool of potentially qualified applicants. Companies should pay attention to invocations of "culture" when screening candidates, being mindful of "rejection not only due to race and/or gender, but also accent, nationality, religious garb, and dress" (Ashley).

The implications of these problematic notions of "culture" not only impact racial diversity, but also the intellectual and cognitive diversity that can accompany it. "People may feel less likely to contribute innovative ways of doing things if they feel the culture does not reflect one that welcomes different thinking" (Weinstein). This can lead to a mutually reinforcing narrow-mindedness that creates a lasting liability. Therefore, our panelists recommended proceeding with caution in outlining any required skills or competencies that are broadly used across the company, instead making space for individuals who are "cultural adds."

3. Imagining the "Ideal Candidate" or Setting the "Internal Bar"

Another form of implicit criteria can emerge when hiring managers or other team members hold in their minds "an existing employee or ideal candidate with a non-diverse background as the model" (Nelson-Streete). The model could, for example, be based on a previous person in the role, or someone in a similar position whom the hiring manager respects.

"In most cases, the 'ideal candidate' will *not* be an individual of under-represented talent, so the bias immediately doesn't support a diverse hire" (Paul Lesser). Then, when a candidate who looks like the mental image is in the pipeline, confirmation bias takes effect. It can be so subtle that individuals may be completely unaware that "they are perpetuating biases and systematic barriers to employment" (Kelley).

Even without a specific physical image of the ideal candidate, a hiring manager might have a mental representation of the "right" type or level of experience. This "internal bar" may be "higher than what is needed to be successful on the job" (Kelley). When this ideal is established, candidates are then compared against it, therefore setting unarticulated and unnecessary standards that can prevent high-potential, racially diverse talent from being considered.

4. Implicit Proxies

Even if proxies are removed from the explicit criteria, they are likely still present in the psyches of those in the interviewing room. An interviewer may assume the presence or absence of certain skills or competencies based on a factor that they believe correlates with those skills or competencies, even in cases where the team member has no personal connection to the proxy (i.e., no

> Decades upon decades of racism based on the beliefs of Blacks being 'inherently less' is woven through our culture.
>
> — Benjamin Reese

bias resulting from candidate affinity). While information learned about a candidate may seem objective, each hiring team member brings their subjective interpretations to what a candidate shares. Bias may infiltrate these preconceived notions, through both systemic stereotypes and individual experiences.

For example, an interviewer might associate intelligence with certain academic institutions, or technical competence with certain prior employers, because of their perceptions of those brands. Candidates who have privileged access to such institutions and employers may be falsely assigned those qualities due to the presence of these proxies. Individuals who lack such access may not be granted the halo effect offered by the proxies. This can, for example, unconsciously favor "historically White university graduates as opposed to historically Black college and university (HBCU) graduates, and large, White-owned businesses compared with Black-owned businesses" (Reese).

D. Solution: Standardized and Data-centric Evaluation Processes

Implementing standardized and data-centric hiring processes is key to mitigating the impact of implicit criteria (and thus unconscious bias) on hiring.[6] "Standardized" refers to the way the process is designed and executed, and "data-centric" refers to the type of content that runs through the process.

> The only way to really progress here is to implement the tools and systems necessary to provide transparency and accuracy in hiring, powered by data and in the pursuit of diversity.
>
> — Nick Shekerdemian

1. Standardized

A standardized evaluation process is one that collects, interprets, and judges data while minimizing variations or exceptions from one candidate to the next. In a standardized interview process (data collection), "interviews and/or performance tasks use the same set of questions or tasks for each candidate" (Kelley). And in a standardized decision-making process (interpretation and judgment), a common tracking document, or rubric, is applied and aligned to the skills and competencies required for the role, thus holding all candidates to the same objective standards.

Creating interview guides at the outset of hiring processes ensures that data (candidate responses) are solicited the same way for each candidate. This approach has many benefits: it enables hiring teams to plan their questions more thoughtfully, removes variability across interviews and interviewers, and reduces opportunities for interviewers to indulge in spontaneous or irrelevant questions that can invite bias.

In addition to internal efficiency gains, a standardized hiring process signals fairness, seriousness, and equity externally, which can be seen as welcoming to diverse candidates. "To attract top talent in a competitive labor market, companies need to have an efficient interview process in which both the company and the candidate have the opportunity to meet each other and evaluate if there is a mutually beneficial fit" (Lesser).

It is possible for a standardized process to be biased — i.e., if all candidates are put through the same *biased* process. This brings us to the second solution component: data-centricity.

2. Data-centric

A "data-centric" process is one in which the content running through the evaluation process is as objective and factual as possible. As such, it is important to institute systems of checks and balances to ensure the integrity of the data collected. When comparing candidates in a truly data-centric process, the debate will be about the demonstrable performance or skill level exhibited by each candidate as evidenced by their past experiences or their execution against performance tasks.

> The more objective and structured something is, the less it is impacted by unconscious bias — which means, the fairer and more inclusive it is.
>
> — Nick Shekerdemian

[6] While it is beyond the scope of this paper, there are elements discussed here, most notably implicit criteria, that also affect the process of sourcing candidates. Recruiters and other sources may, knowingly or not, give preference to certain schools, prior employers, referrals, or other factors over others. It is also important for those involved in talent acquisition to be aware of and heed the dangers of dependence on implicit criteria.

Standardized and Data-centric Evaluation Processes

1. Candidate Application and Screening

Standardized

- Use the same screening process and criteria for all applicants, including leveraging the same ATS filtering criteria
- Use standardized phone screen guides
- Use tools that block names and other resume content that might reveal demographic information to screeners
- Avoid communicating any preferences to downstream interviewers or creating nonstandard "VIP paths" for certain candidates

Data-centric

- Ask candidates for detail on relevant skills and competencies as a supplement to resumes
- Collect portfolios or work samples that demonstrate skills and competencies
- Consider only experiences or credentials that directly verify skills (industry-recognized accreditation, apprenticeships, training programs)
- Ensure phone screen questions focus on relevant skills and competencies

2. Candidate Evaluation

Standardized

- Create standardized interview guides and performance tasks that map to the skills and competencies for the role
- Use the same interview questions and performance tasks for every candidate for a given role
- Assign each interviewer a subset of skills and competencies to evaluate
- Keep "take home" performance tasks short to minimize variations due to candidate bandwidth

Data-centric

- Use Situation, Task, Action, Result (STAR) question format in interviews
- Ensure interviewers capture detailed notes on the information shared and skills demonstrated by candidates (rather than their subjective impression)
- Where possible, integrate performance tasks to supplement interviews
- Draw on subject-matter experts when developing interview guides and performance tasks

3. Decision Making

Standardized

- Use a common, predetermined rubric and rating/scoring system for skills and competencies across all candidates
- Establish definitions for ratings within the rubric, clearly defining what each rating in the scale means
- Eliminate checkboxes or input fields on interview feedback forms that ask for an overall hiring recommendation

Data-centric

- Ensure interviewers back their candidate ratings for a given skill or competency with specific data
- Conduct peer review of this supporting data to ensure it is both relevant to the skill or competency in question and free from bias
- Ask interviewers for ratings and data points only for their areas of focus — actively discourage speculation on other skills or competencies

Personal Bias Check and Hiring Team Audit Questions. Ask:

- Do I find myself focusing on someone's style of speech or body mannerisms, or something I have in common with them?
- Am I being swayed by mental models based on my current colleagues?
- Do I find myself gauging whether certain candidates seem like a good "fit" with the company?
- Do my notes reflect what the candidate shared about their experiences, or do they include my own interpretations?
- Am I evaluating the skills and experience listed on the resume/rubric, or am I bringing in my own assumptions about what skills are needed for the job?
- In what ways have I come into this decision-making process having already excluded or endorsed this candidate? To what degree am I open to new information?

IV. SUSTAINING IMPACT: BUILDING CULTURAL MOMENTUM

Driving lasting change requires sustained effort at the organizational, team, and individual levels. It is not, and cannot be, a one-time effort, nor can it be siloed to one group or function (e.g., Human Resources). Like any effective change management effort, organizations need to commit to equipping teams with the training and resources needed for success. Thereafter, organizations must hold those teams — and the individuals who comprise them — accountable for adoption.

A. Equip and Engage Your Teams

1. Training — Bias Awareness and Applied Skills

Our panelists cited training as one of the most important levers for driving lasting impact. They shared several components of an effective training program:

- **Start at the top**. Actively training management teams helps build momentum, by demonstrating the company's commitment and the leadership team's willingness to be transparent and vulnerable about their own biases.
- **Bring in experts**. Invest in third-party support to optimize the training content and process. This may include learning and development generalists or focused DEI experts.
- **Build awareness**. Consider having individuals take a personal bias-revealing test (such as the Implicit Association Test). Personal introspection can help individuals overcome denial and build awareness about how bias can impact their decision making. All hiring teams should require significant education about implicit bias — what it is, its impact on the hiring process, and the types of bias (e.g., confirmation, appearance, and affinity) most prevalent at each stage of the hiring process.

> All those involved in the hiring process benefit from learning about the diverse ways we are all biased, which enables us to see others more objectively.
>
> — Carole Weinstein

- **Make it actionable**. Ensure that bias training directly references the new processes or guidelines being rolled out, to help employees connect their awareness to the organization's commitments. For example,

interviewers particularly benefit from learning how to "listen precisely and objectively, use language that is freer from bias, and take notes based on what the candidate actually shares" (Weinstein). Training alone will not move the needle unless it is tied to specific behaviors and applications.

- **Install reminders and checklists**. There is a steep "forgetting curve" in adult learning when learners do not apply the training right away. During training, ensure that learners have opportunities to practice the new skill or behavior in real time. Afterward, weave just-in-time training touchpoints into processes, such that each trainee learns and practices the desired behavior at the time it's needed. Create and integrate job aids and recall prompts into every step of the hiring pipeline — for example, reviewing unconscious bias recall sheets or other checklists can stimulate recall of implicit bias education at the time of need.

2. Inclusive Interviewing Teams

Our panelists unanimously stressed the importance of having diverse interview teams. A diverse pool of interviewers creates a more inclusive experience for *all* candidates, and can reassure candidates of color in particular. In addition, when interviewing teams regroup to make hiring decisions, a diverse team can provide checks and balances that minimize decision-making biases and help the hiring manager identify potential blind spots.

However, our panelists also cautioned against a blunt approach that removes important stakeholders in the name of diversity. To maintain a positive candidate experience (and sufficiently tight turnaround times), interviewing teams should be relatively small, which can limit the elements of diversity that can be included on any given team (e.g., race, national origin, religion, gender, and ideology).[7] Nonetheless, panelists suggested striving for inclusive hiring teams wherever possible.

B. Reinforce Accountability

Despite their earnest intentions, many organizations' initiatives around unconscious bias and diversity hiring have had limited impact. One consistent culprit is a lack of real accountability — a framework of rules, processes, rewards, and consequences necessary for behavioral change. Organizations rarely make meaningful changes — particularly ones that run against ingrained habits — without there being clear downsides for inaction or failure.

1. Organizational Accountability

As we have discussed, organizational accountability will be effective only if it starts from the top — ideally with a strategic DEI plan and regular updates to leadership and/or a board of directors. Organizations should go a step further, however, by communicating goals and progress externally at regular intervals. To support accountability, organizations may also seek review from, or report results to, external partners or coalitions, as was done during the T-Mobile/Sprint merger.

Strategic plans and reports will vary across organizations depending on their unique situations. Our panelists recommended conducting an organizational audit, grounded in aggregated metrics, to establish a baseline. Academic institutions and like-minded peer organizations can help identify benchmarks and best practices. Then, establish milestones to evaluate those metrics at regular time intervals.

[7] Panelists encouraged leveraging employee resource groups for guidance here.

Next, bring these milestones to individual units within the organization, by creating KPIs that are visible to leaders at all levels. This establishes a bridge between organizational and individual accountability at the level of individual hiring managers.

2. Individual Accountability

Panelists recommended tying hiring managers' performance evaluations to progress against organizational metrics and communicating their individual progress against goals or organizational averages on a regular basis. Organizations can also make goal achievement a component of compensation decisions. Connecting diversity hiring goals to compensation is a powerful way to inspire change, but it is essential that those goals be grounded in each hiring manager's demographic context, particularly for organizations that are distributed across geographies with different labor pools.

Organizations may also ask hiring managers to self-report the tangible actions they have taken to contribute to organization-level goals as part of performance review cycles, further encouraging individual action. This can reinforce individual hiring managers' sense of empowerment and autonomy.

There is also the question of accountability at the level of individual hiring team members (i.e., interviewers). These employees do not "own" hiring outcomes, but their biases can have a material impact on those outcomes. As such, hiring managers should host regular trainings and refresher courses on bias for interviewers, foster an environment where all hiring team members can provide each other supportive and direct feedback, and solicit and track candidate feedback to flag any issues that emerge during interviews.

V. CONCLUSION

Companies that employ diverse, inclusive teams are not only doing the right thing from a values perspective, but also developing a profound competitive advantage. Businesses that hire the best talent will outmaneuver others who fail to adapt. Companies known for inclusive work environments create a compounding cycle that enables them to access broader talent pools and develop and retain talent more sustainably.

Nonetheless, unconscious bias thwarts sincere commitments to economic and racial equity. Despite the clear business advantages, most organizations have made little progress in the past 20-plus years to close the racial gap in hiring, in large part because they don't fully understand how bias affects their hiring processes.

While the headwinds may be strong, panelists agreed that organizations can achieve progress with sincere, long-term action plans. As with all efforts to advance racial equality, change must start from a place of vulnerability and introspection — a deeply honest acknowledgment of our responsibilities as employers and as human beings. It requires the active engagement of leadership, experts, and diverse communities within organizations. It requires dynamic systems of measurement backed by accountability. It requires actions as seemingly simple as removing fields from an interview template, and as profound as terminations of noncompliant team members. And it requires bringing bias to the forefront, rather than leaving it unconscious.

GLG's panelists encourage business leaders to act soon, and decisively. Progress may be imperfect or even incremental, but collective action, compounded over time, will create meaningful change for all.

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