

Blind Applicant Screening – An Emerging Trend to Overcome the Diversity Challenge



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As HR professionals, many of us are familiar with the causes and consequences of hiring bias. Some of us may have experienced first hand being turned down for a job for a reason that has nothing to do with capability. But even with this awareness, hiring bias is a difficult challenge to overcome, and despite significant diversity campaigns' and initiatives the diversity of local communities is still not fully reflected in the make up of most organizations and employers.

One recruitment trend that is receiving more and more attention is blind screening. Blind screening refers to the removal of data or information that gives clues as to the gender and socio-economic background of an applicant, (for example, the applicant's name, address, whether they went to college and/or which college they went to) thereby reducing or eliminating the usual factors contributing to hiring bias. Technology has made blind screening an increasingly viable tool, and a growing number of employers are re-thinking their selection process to focus is squarely on demonstrated skill and ability, rather than on factors such as educational attainment, which alone have no correlation to predicted job performance. The ultimate purpose? Finding the very best, most diverse group of talent from which to hire.

To be most effective blind screening can be combined with an initial online skills test, situational judgment test, or other skill based test to ensure applicants passing to the next stage of screening do so based solely on their ability to demonstrate job related skill. Some employers such as KPMG take this further, with blind screening carried through to a resume blind initial phone interview, where the interviewer has no prior knowledge about the applicant, and the applicant is required to answer situational and behavioral interview questions to demonstrate experience and knowledge related to the position for which they have applied.

Prestigious employers who historically sought to recruit top graduates from Ivy League colleges have started to recognize that they are missing out on top talent and adjusted their selection process to broaden the pool of candidates eligible for consideration. For example, leading UK law firm Clifford Chance implemented blind screening, and saw a 30% increase in the diversity of educational background of its graduate trainee intake in the first year. Google's Sr. VP of people operations said in a 2013 interview with the New York Times that GPAs and test scores "don't predict anything," and in fact, the proportion of people without any college education at Google has increased over time as the company developed predictive selection tools with a focus on focus on general cognitive ability, capacity for learning, and processing "on the fly". That's not to say that the skills and experience individuals acquire in the process of obtaining a degree are not valued, but instead the selection process is designed to ensure that successful applicants are those who are able to demonstrate skill and experience, whether that was obtained in the process of studying for a college degree, or in another environment. After all, just having a degree of high GPA does not automatically mean someone has the talent or skill needed to be successful at a particular job.

As we enter a new fiscal year and are forward planning recruitment efforts to ensure a healthy distribution of talent and skill across the organization, we have an ideal opportunity to re-examine recruitment process and strategy, with a view to making the best hiring choices and also improving on the ever-present challenge of increasing diversity within your organization.

Years of hiring freezes combined with many workers reaching retirement age and leaving the workplace has created pent up demand for hiring across all levels of organizations. The additional impact of increased turnover as the recovering economy creates more opportunities elsewhere will no doubt add to the challenge of filling vacant positions with qualified talent.

Designing a selection process that is blind to gender and socio-economic information in the early stages can significantly increase the diversity of your candidate pool moving into the final stages of selection.