

Case Study @ IBM- Interrupting Bias in Hiring

Background

As late as 1970, the top 5 orchestras in the U.S. had fewer than 5% women. A vast majority of symphony orchestras revised their hiring practices including “blind” auditions using screens to conceal the identity and gender of the musician from the selection panel, which resulted in an increase of women hires. Many corporates began using blind auditioning as bias interrupters, to see if the results could be replicated in business. Australian organisations who apply blind recruitment practices include Ernst & Young, Victoria Police, Westpac Bank, KPMG, while others, like the Australian Bureau of Statistics, have limited the practice to senior hires only. Many more organisations have adopted this practice, without an I&D Audit to understand where the metrics and ‘lived experience’ of bias occurs in the hiring process.

Mitchell Services
Client

Blinding CVs challenges:

- Adoption of the bias interrupter without an I&D Audit measuring if this is where bias occurs.
- Excessive hours required by recruitment to ‘blind’ CV details for hiring managers
- Inequity in internal candidates applying for roles, where details are not ‘blind’
- Inequity of the hiring process; the practice is often limited to senior hires only.
- Lack of rigorous research demonstrating causal impact between blind hiring & positive outcomes.

I&D Audit

Mitchell Services conducted an I&D Audit at IBM; to track every stage of the application process to isolate where biases may exist and interrupt it. The audit revealed the gender field was not mandatory at application stage, causing a data hole across the recruitment pipeline. Leveraging big data enabled the issue to be isolated and exposed; for every 100 men applying, only 1 women applied. The recruitment team now knew there was an attraction issue in the hiring pipeline.

Bias Interrupter

Based on I&D Audit evidence, blind hiring was not a viable bias interrupter as the issue was pinpointed at attraction stage- not screening. In addition, given the thousands of CVs received for single roles, a lack of rigorous research on the benefits, but also IBM's focus on big data. We now have the awareness, the analytics, and the technology to use big data for the benefit of revealing trends and gaps, not concealing and hiding data. The bias interrupter selected was a job description review to ensure gender neutral language was used to describe job requirements.

Bias Interrupter Outcomes

By changing the way job descriptions were written, IBM raised women experienced hires from 23 per cent to 30 per cent. “That is the highest rate in 50 years. It was a small thing to do, you could almost disregard it, but it had a big effect” said IBM ANZ GM

Evidence-based approach

In 2016, the Victorian Government began a trial to blind CVs, focused on senior appointments only. Professor Michael Hiscox, a Harvard academic, called a halt to blind hiring, stating that the measure is not assisting in promoting diversity & is creating an opposite effect of favouring men. The [report](#) demonstrated that due to prior **1** efforts to promote awareness and support for diversity among senior staff, hiring managers were now 2.9% more likely to shortlist women candidates when CVs were not blinded.