

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



11 Gender diversity in recruitment

Gender-positive recruitment processes a critical step in creating inclusive workplaces

Smart leaders know their organisations benefit from attracting, developing and retaining a diverse workforce. For many women, though, subtle barriers during the recruitment process can derail hopes and careers. Simple steps can shift those frustrating patterns.

Board and executive leadership teams are under increasing pressure to explain the lack of talented women in their senior ranks and what they’re doing about it. The common justification “We want to hire more women but we just can’t find them” no longer cuts it in a competitive world where gender-positive policies and practices are shown to deliver measureable benefits.

Extensive research demonstrates that diversity of thought and experience in decision-making teams drives innovation, speeds solution building and yields better performance. To nurture that diversity, leaders must create and maintain a welcoming and inclusive culture that makes talented people want to join, and stay.

As Sweef Capital Vice President Ms Samantha Tedjosugondo notes, committing to an explicit gender diversity recruitment strategy is a crucial first step.

“It’s well-documented that gender bias creates hurdles at every stage of the employment cycle,” Ms Tedjosugondo says. “Organisations that want to attract the best talent – any gender – should accept this as fact, look hard at how they recruit and develop people, and be prepared to do it differently.”

It’s not enough to believe you’re doing well. Even the most well-intentioned leaders come with biases,

cautions Ms Kimberly Manno Reott, who oversees SAGANA Talent, part of impact investment and advisory firm, SAGANA (see breakout).

“We’ve come a long, long way – this is a topic the companies we work with are keen to talk about,” Ms Reott says. “There’s still, though, so much unconscious bias that all of us walk around with, and the place that tends to play out is in recruiting.”

From affinity bias and confirmation bias to the halo effect (and its negative twin, horn bias), recruitment is a minefield for the unwary to navigate. A paper by Australia’s Workplace

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Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ indicator matrix



The Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ identifies gender equality and diversity gaps and informs interventions to build resilience, equal opportunity and inclusion. This Insight Series explores how each indicator contributes to delivering social, financial and economic returns: <https://sweefcapital.com/gender-roitm/>

Gender Equality Agency is blunt about the need for an overhaul: “Many organisations that purport to be meritocratic are not, because the notion of merit provides a veneer of objectivity which allows biased decisions to go unchallenged”.

“It’s important for the recruitment team to understand the different types of biases that form part of recruitment processes,” Ms Tedjosugondo says. “Diversity and education training should be an ongoing process, not something you complete once to check a box.”

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- Samantha Tedjosugondo,
Sweef Capital

The barriers that people of diverse backgrounds face during recruitment are depressingly well-known. These range from gender-coded wording in job advertisements and loaded interview questions to male-dominant industry norms, role stereotypes and loose or inconsistent processes that favour ‘just like me’ candidates.

As Stanford researchers pointed out in a 2019 *Harvard Business Review* article, “it’s time for leaders to stop blaming their companies’ lack of diversity on the lack of women applicants – they need to focus on *why* they’re not seeing more women applicants”.

To get started, Ms Reott suggests organisations break the recruiting process into two parts: sourcing and selection of candidates.

“In both those areas there are things you can do to improve gender diversity recruiting in your firm,” she says. “On the sourcing side, if you want to ensure you have a diverse slate of candidates, you need to intentionally tap into networks where there are more female candidates with the kinds of qualifications you need.”

Passive sourcing typically involves casting a net via a posted job advertisement to see what comes back. SAGANA Talent uses active sourcing tools such as social media platforms like LinkedIn and artificial intelligence (AI) software to proactively identify and reach out to suitable candidates and get them excited about a role.

Another potential barrier is job descriptions laced with masculine language and inferences. SAGANA Talent uses an AI platform to assess job descriptions for inclusive language.

“There’s a lot of research showing women respond to job descriptions differently to men,” Ms Reott says. “Women often won’t apply for a job if they don’t meet nearly all the criteria, where the flip side is true for men. It’s another reason why, in addition to inclusive language, you should include only the most important things you need from the candidate.”

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- Kimberly Manno Reott,
SAGANA

Common biases during selection can be addressed through clear and consistent interviewing and evaluation techniques, a focus on candidate skills and attitudes, and alignment with the organisation’s values and ways of working.

“These are things that are super-simple but a lot of organisations, particularly fast-growing start-ups, are reluctant to put processes in place,” Ms Reott says. “At the end of the day, these processes are going to help you on the gender side but also help you to make better business decisions. These are best practices that go beyond gender.”

Ms Tedjosugondo says collecting gender-disaggregated data on recruitment, shortlisting, retention, advancement and pay will help to identify critical talent gaps and shortfalls. “Being transparent about this



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information signals that your organisation is serious about tackling the issue and committed to actively monitoring and measuring your performance.”

The final piece, for Ms Reott, is retaining top talent by creating a healthy organisational culture, one where people can learn and grow and know what’s expected of them. “That kind of culture is created when you articulate it,” she says. “People take it for granted unless you tell them what you’re expecting through your values and operating principles.”#

About the contributors



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SAGANA Talent – Empowering people to realise their potential

A Tagalog word from the Philippines, ‘SAGANA’ means abundance. It’s the driving force behind SAGANA Talent, part of next generation impact investment and advisory firm, SAGANA.

“The name was intentionally chosen – it underpins all our work,” says SAGANA Talent Partner, Ms Kimberly Manno Reott. “This idea that there’s enough for all and that our world would be much better served if we could move from fear and scarcity to a place of abundance.”

Headquartered in Zurich, SAGANA brings together professionals and specialists in impact investment, business consulting and talent to create a virtuous circle of high-performing talent powering profitable, purpose-driven businesses. The firm targets investments in sectors such as food and agriculture, climate tech and energy transition, sustainable fashion and healthcare and wellbeing.

Ensuring that its portfolio companies have the right talent to support their growth strategies led SAGANA to establish its talent business.

“Yes, it’s important to raise capital if you’re an impact organisation,” Ms Reott says. “But if you don’t have the right people, and if you don’t have a healthy and inclusive culture for those people to thrive in, it doesn’t matter how much funding you have.”

Ms Reott says the focus is often primarily on an organisation’s external impact through its product or service, and not the leaders and employees responsible for delivering results.

“The missing piece is the impact that organisations have on the people who work in them,” she says. “How powerful would it be if every workplace (offered) a healthy and safe environment, where people feel valued and appreciated. There’s a ripple effect that’s enormous.” #

For more about SAGANA Talent, visit <https://sagana.com/>



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